

The Faith that Thanks

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

Every year around Thanksgiving, a local elementary school teacher assigns her class to write a letter to someone they've never properly thanked. One year, a student wrote to her school janitor, thanking him for always keeping the halls clean, even when no one noticed. The janitor wept when he read it. "I didn't think anyone saw what I did," he said. That simple expression of gratitude transformed both the giver and the receiver.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 17:11-19), Jesus meets ten lepers who cry out to him, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" They are suffering not only physically but emotionally and spiritually. They are cut off from their communities, their synagogues, and even their families. Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priests, the official way to be declared clean under the Law. And as they go, they are healed. But only one turns back. And he wasn't just any one: he was a Samaritan. A foreigner. An outsider to the Jewish faith. Yet it is this man who alone returns, glorifying God and falling at Jesus's feet in thanks. "Were not ten made clean?" Jesus asks. "Where are the other nine?" Jesus then says to the Samaritan: "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."

Notice that all ten were healed physically but only one is told he is saved. His healing went deeper. It touched his soul. Why? Because his faith didn't end in relief; it overflowed into gratitude. His return to Jesus showed more than courtesy; it showed that he recognized Jesus not just as healer but as Lord.

In this powerful encounter, Jesus teaches us that faith is not merely believing that God exists or asking him for help. Faith is also returning to give thanks, recognizing the Giver behind the gift. So often we are like the nine. We pray when we are in need but forget to return when things are well.

Pope Benedict XVI once wrote: "It is faith that saves human beings, re-establishing them in their profound relationship with God, themselves and others; and faith is expressed in gratitude." The Samaritan's faith restored not just his health but his communion with God and his place in the human family. His gratitude was a sign that his heart had truly been transformed.

This Gospel invites us to reflect: How often do we pray for healing, provision, forgiveness, but fail to come back and say "thank you"? Do we see the blessings in our lives with our families, health, the sacraments, the very breath in our lungs—as gifts that call for praise?

At every Mass, the Church reminds us of this lesson. The very word "Eucharist" means thanksgiving. Like the healed leper, we are invited to return again and again to fall at the feet of Christ in praise, knowing that the deepest healing he offers is not just for our bodies but for our souls. Let us not be among the nine who walk away. Let us be the one who returns.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Rudy