

28th Sunday in Ordinary time C

A boy fell off a pier into deep ocean water. An old sailor who saw this jumped into the ocean and risked his own life to save the life of the boy. Two days later, the boy's mother came with him to the same pier seeking the sailor who rescued her son. Finding him she asked, "Are you the one who jumped into the ocean to save my son?" "Yes, I am," said the sailor. The mother quickly demanded, "Then where is his hat?" The central theme of today's liturgy is gratitude. The liturgy today paints the picture of a God who desires gratitude from us for the many blessings we receive from Him and who feels the pain of ingratitude. Leprosy at the time of Jesus meant any skin disease. It was a dreaded disease that was considered a punishment from God. They were socially isolated and, therefore, they suffered both physically and mentally. The Book of Leviticus has laid down what the lepers could and could not do. A leper was unclean and could not come in contact with others. When a leper got cured, he or she had to be examined by a priest and had to obtain a certificate of good health in order to get back into the society of normal people.

In the first reading of today, we heard of Naaman, the Syrian, who was cured by Prophet Elisha. Though he was not an Israelite, God blessed him with a cure. He returned to thank Prophet Elisha for the cure. He also became the worshipper of the God of Israel. In the second reading Paul advises Timothy to be grateful to God even in his physical sufferings and dangers associated with spreading the Word of God. We can never thank God enough for all the blessings we receive from Him. After becoming a priest, the first sick call I had was to visit a young lady who was in a wheel chair. She had been in a car wreck, and she was paralyzed below her neck. She needed assistance for everything. She told me all that happened to her and how she ended up in a wheel chair. All the time I spent with her, she had a smiling face. At one moment she told me, "Father, I am so grateful to God that I can still hear and see." Then I asked, "What if you eventually lose your sight and hearing?" She said, "I would still be grateful to God for giving me a wonderful husband and two children who take great care of me." I left her feeling so happy, so energized, and very grateful. God has two dwelling places: one is the heavens, and the other is a grateful heart.

In the gospel of today, we have the story of the healing of the 10 lepers. Jesus healed all 10 of them, but only one returned to thank him—and he was a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies. The Jewish lepers went their way. Perhaps they hurried off to get their health certificate from the priest and forgot about the healer. Jews believed that healing was their right as God's chosen people. But, by healing also a Samaritan, Jesus shows that our God is not a God of partiality. But He is a God of all. Do you know who the greatest saint in the world is? He is not one who fasts most. She is not one who prays most. He is not one who is most generous. But one who is thankful to God and receives everything as a blessing from Him. Often we are ungrateful to God. We take all His blessings for granted. We are often thankful only when we compare ourselves to others who are less fortunate. If there is a shortest and surest way to happiness, it is to thank and praise God for all that happens to you. When you are able to thank God even for the bad things, you turn them into a blessing. We are here to celebrate the Eucharist. The very meaning of the word "Eucharist" is "thanksgiving." We are thanking God for the great gift of His Son who made us into a People of God. So let us make every Eucharist that we take part in to be a real time of thanksgiving.