

## **Twenty- Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

### **Luke 17:11-19 in its biblical context**

This Gospel story of Jesus curing the ten lepers follows immediately after the previous week's reading. Luke begins once again by mentioning that Jesus is on a journey to Jerusalem. This reference to a journey to Jerusalem is intended to show that even though Jesus knows what awaits him in Jerusalem he is choosing to make this journey in fidelity to his father's will.

To understand the full significance of this story, we must recall some earlier scenes of Luke's Gospel. In Luke 4:16-22, Jesus began his public ministry by reading a scroll from the prophet Isaiah. After reading the scroll Jesus tells the people that the scripture passage is fulfilled. Jesus is telling the people that they are living in the time when God is fulfilling God's promises, and that those promises are being fulfilled through him.

Jesus then goes on to tell his townspeople that no prophet is accepted in his native place, and he reminds them of times when non-Israelites have been the ones to benefit from a prophet's gift of healing (Luke 4:23-30).

Later John the Baptist's disciples come to Jesus and ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" (Luke 7:19b). Jesus responds by holding up the mighty signs he has performed as evidence of his identity: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed ..." (Luke 7:22b). Jesus' curing of lepers is held up to John's disciples as a sign that Jesus is "the one who is to come," the fulfilment of God's promises.

In the Gospel story of the cure of the ten lepers, all that Jesus has said is coming to fulfilment: Jesus cures ten lepers and among them is a non-Israelite. As is true of other miracle stories, the account is designed to draw our attention to the identity of Jesus.

The ten lepers stand at a distance and call because they are unclean. They are not supposed to approach others or touch them. Jesus simply tells the lepers, "Go show yourselves to the priests." The purpose of showing themselves to the priests was to be declared clean so that they could be readmitted into the community (see Lev 14:2). So to obey this instruction was an act of faith on the part of each of them. While they were on the way they were cleansed.

Luke then describes how one of the lepers, upon realising that he was healed, "returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan." As Jesus responds to the Samaritan he uses the occasion to emphasize three points: that only one returned to give thanks, that this one was a foreigner, and that the foreigner's faith has brought him salvation. In commenting on gratitude Jesus says that the gratitude should be directed toward God. However, Jesus is God's agent, and the man's realisation of Jesus' identity has brought him not only a cure, but salvation: "... Your faith has saved you."

## Reflection

The gospel is the familiar one about ten lepers being healed, but only one returning to give thanks to Jesus. As with any gift, Jesus' healing them went beyond their expectations, was freely given by Jesus, and established a unique relationship between Jesus and the ten lepers. But only one acknowledges that relationship by giving thanks. The parable reminds us that it is not enough to cry to God for help; it is not even enough to experience God's healing action. We are meant to acknowledge God's gracious activity on our behalf by giving God thanks and worship. Gratitude was not necessary for the healing (all ten were healed!). God's saving activity does not depend on us. The gratitude was necessary, however, for God's gracious deed to be acknowledged and proclaimed, announcing that God has acted. Gratitude helps make known God's mighty deeds.

Thus the ten lepers exemplify aspects of our relationship with God: acknowledgment of need ("Have pity on us"), obedience ("Go....' ....as they were going"), and reception of divine grace ("they were cleansed"). The Samaritan leper demonstrates another aspect of this relationship: only when he returns to glorify God and thank Jesus, does Jesus reveal that he has, in fact, been saved. For us, as for the Samaritan leper, salvation is revealed and experienced in worship and thanksgiving.

Salvation, worship, and thanksgiving are closely connected. Both events – God's saving activity and our thankful worship – cement a giver-receiver relationship with God. God freely offers us salvation; worship and thanksgiving manifest within the community our acknowledgment and reception of salvation. Worship and thanksgiving are our yes to God's gifts to us.

This is what happens on the journey to Jerusalem: on the way we are all cleansed – saved. This is one reason why all the little things of our everyday lives – those things which happen to us along the journey – are so important. They are manifestations of God's acting on our behalf, healing us and saving us. We want to seize them and give thanks.

One challenge of this Gospel is to see God's promise of salvation unfolding in these everyday events of our lives. Faithful service, then, is our response to seeing God in these events. Gratitude – acknowledging God's actions on our behalf – is an all-enveloping context for living our lives. When gratitude is put on as a way of living, then worship, too, becomes a way of living. Rather than relegated to an hour on Sunday, worship is part of all the little actions which make up each of our days. For that, let us give thanks!

### **Questions for Faith-Sharing Groups**

- Like the ten lepers, what needs do I acknowledge before God?
- Like the Samaritan leper, when have you realised God's goodness to you?
- What does it mean to be like the Samaritan leper and 'give thanks to God'?
- Think of a time in your life when you were overwhelmed with gratitude. What happened? Whom did you thank?
- When have you had to walk in faith, trusting that things would work out before they actually had worked out? Are there times when you have failed to do this? Explain.