

St Bart's 18th Sunday after Pentecost (12 Oct 2025)

HOMILY

I. Our readings this morning reflect something of the kindness and faithfulness of God: God's desire, God's will, for us to thrive, to be whole; and our response to God's faithfulness.

The Gospel reading in particular focuses on the well-known story of what we call 'The Ten Lepers.' These days we know they're not all necessarily suffering from leprosy — that is Hansen's Disease — but also from a variety of skin problems that were considered infectious and which made them, above all, ritually unclean. This uncleanness effectively banished them from society and they were shunned.

And in this context we find an highly unusual alliance between a group of Jewish folk and a Samaritan who are all suffering from one of these unclean skin complaints. They're forced to live together for sheer survival, trying to scrape together a living. Usually Jews and Samaritans had as little to do with each other as possible. There was a history behind that, a history of violence and warfare which made them sworn enemies. It's a sad picture at first of exclusion and suffering and alienation and the fight for survival in this small band.

II. But that picture is transformed by the compassion and power of Jesus who does not shun this tragic group of people. When they ask for mercy, he does not run away but rather moves towards them in love and acceptance. He sends them off to the temple to be declared clean by the priests and they obey him; and on the way they find themselves miraculously healed, made whole. Why? Because, after seeing the priests, they can then be re-integrated back into society, to their homes and their way of life.

III. But this is more than a healing story. It's also a story about gratitude. They all believe the word of Jesus, they all show a degree of faith in him, and they're all healed as a result. Yet only the Samaritan shows gratitude. Only he returns to give thanks, to offer worship to God, to acknowledge the miracle of his healing and to express his gratitude and love to Jesus. Only his healing is whole.

This of course is not the first time in Luke's Gospel we've encountered a Samaritan. There's also the Parable of the Good Samaritan, another strange story where the notion of a Samaritan being good would have been ridiculous to Jesus' audience. And in Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, Samaritans are among the first outside Judaism to become followers of Jesus..

Luke, in other words, has a soft spot for Samaritans because they're regarded as outsiders, hated & despised, treated as unclean and contaminating; and because they were among the first to believe in Jesus in the early church.

So this story about gratitude has the Samaritan at the centre of that group— the double outsider who contrasts with everyone else, by offering a grateful heart to God through Christ. Again, as in the Parable, the Samaritan is the unexpected hero, the one who ironically is the exemplary disciple.

IV. In our own very materialistic and acquisitive culture, there's not much room for thankfulness. Our culture encourages a competitive rather than grateful spirit. People sometimes have a sense of entitlement, and resentment if their egos are not stroked and flattered. It's the opposite of thankfulness which requires a spirit of humility and openness.

Yet gratitude is a powerful force that can transform our lives. It's not a matter of pretending there's nothing wrong or that everything is happy and without problems. Rather it's a matter of acknowledging the good things in our lives, even when times are tough. In a pastoral context, when

someone has just died, the priest usually gives thanks for the person's life, as well as praying for their soul and asking God to comfort those who are grieving.

We need that emphasis on gratitude in our world today. One helpful, spiritual practice last thing at night is to review our day and express our thanks for two three good things that have been part of it: perhaps a meeting with a friend or a kind act bestowed on us or a sudden awareness of the beauty of the world around us. Whatever it is, we're encouraged, not only to acknowledge the difficulties of our lives and to lay them before the Lord, but also to acknowledge and express our thanks.

For Christians, as well as for Jews and Muslims, gratitude is integral to the spirituality we share and it articulates our belief that God is the creator of all things, the author of all that's good and worthwhile and meaningful.

V. Today our readings encourage us to two things. Firstly, it's about healing. We're encouraged to acknowledge the points in our lives where we've received healing, whether physical or mental or social; the contexts where, in the words of Jeremiah, we've built homes and planted gardens and celebrated weddings and seen children and grandchildren. We're also encouraged to name the places where we still need healing from the Lord; and where we can be forces of healing for others. And to recognise that, even when healing and prosperity have come through other people, the ultimate giver has been God.

At the same time, we're called to develop and deepen a spirit of thankfulness: not only to God but also to others, to one another. To express our gratitude for the life and companionship we share, for our community, for the opportunities to show kindness and justice to others, especially the poor.

The Eucharist lies at the heart of all this. The greatest gift God has given us is that of God's own self, God made flesh in Christ in whom we live and die, as 2 Timothy tells us. Christ gives us the gift of eternal life, the gift of himself, which is embodied above all in the holy Eucharist, in bread and wine which become his body and his blood. And the prayer we make in the Eucharist is the great prayer of thanksgiving on behalf, not just of ourselves but also of the church and the world and creation. Indeed, the word 'Eucharist' means thankfulness.

Let us in our lives today be open to God's healing grace and be always ready to bless the Lord as he, in so many ways, has blessed us.

*Mthr Dorothy*