

Twenty Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

I don't remember the first words that I learnt to say as a child. But I suspect that some of the first words that my mother tried to teach me were the words "please" and "thank you". "Please" is a word that we use when we respectfully ask for something that we think we need. "Thank you" are words that we use to express how grateful we are for whatever it is that we have been given. People of faith discover that everything we have been given to us by God and so whenever we speak to God, we have reason to give God thanks. When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we say thanks to God many times. When we hear the first and second reading proclaimed, we respond. "Thanks be to God". We begin the Eucharist Prayer with a conversation about how right it is to give thanks to God.

But not everybody remembers to give thanks to God as we see in the second part of today's gospel. Jesus was travelling along the border between Samaria and Galilee when ten lepers cried out to have pity taken upon them. Anyone suffering from a skin disease was called a leper. One of the worst things about being called a leper was that it meant being cut off from the wider community. In a leper colony the divisions between Jews and gentiles were broken down and so we see that there was a Samaritan among the Jews there. Jesus told the ten to show themselves to the priests. They were the only ones

who could give them a clearance to say that they were healed and so could return to their community. In their obedience to the command to go off and do that, they found that they were all healed. This first part of the gospel is like any other healing story.

But in the second part of the story something else happens. Only one of the ten, and this man was a despised Samaritan, came back to give thanks to God for his healing. Jesus then sent him on his way telling him that it was his faith that had saved him. They all must have had some kind of faith in Jesus' ability to heal them, but only this man had the depth of faith to express his thanks to Jesus and to the God who was at work in him. True faith cannot help but give thanks to God. True faith moves our hearts to recognise where God is at work in our lives and to respond to what we see with thanks.

How does that sit with us? Is it when we are most aware of God at work in our lives and in the lives of others that we are moved to give thanks to God? Does it happen that we sometimes get so overwhelmed by something good or beautiful that we cannot help but thank God for what we experience? Are there times when we are moved to give thanks to God when we received the good news that we have longed to hear or when we are told that something has happened for which we have dearly prayed? I hope those times have been many.

Our first reading today is about a person of faith who desires to give thanks for what God had done for him. He, like the men in our gospel, was a leper. Naaman wants to give the prophet Elisha a gift in thanks for his part in what had happened for him. Elisha wasn't comfortable about that at all. "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing." So Naaman asks if he could take home with him as much earth as two mules could carry to worship the God of Israel who had healed him. Naaman wasn't just healed. He was converted. He makes a profession of faith in God as his prayer of thanks for what he had received from God.

Faith and thanks come together again. I think there is much that we can draw from this. Faith and thanks go together so much in our lives. Faith allows us to see where God is acting for us. Faith allows us to recognise where God is. And when we find God then our response is one of thanks. Faith itself is a gift from God that we can be ever thankful for.

I called into the Pauline Book Shop during the week to see what may be there in their closing down sale. I brought a few books home. One of them was a collection of the Easter Vigil homilies of Pope Francis, some of which came from his time as Archbishop in Buenos Aires. In the first that I read he made the point of how

God always takes the initiative with us. When we think that we are searching for God we discover that God was already searching for us. When we set out to love God, we discover that God has always loved us first. Pope Francis urges us to let God find us and to let God love us as God would want to love us.

I suppose it is a simple message, but it is one that causes us to give thanks to God in many beautiful ways. We can thank God that we are never on our own. God is always with us. We can thank God that whenever we set out to do something good, God has already gone before us preparing the way. God anticipates our fears. He knows what we are anxious about. God wants us to know that he walks with us through those fears and anxieties.

In today's reading from St. Paul's letter to Timothy he urges Timothy to remember the good news that he carries "Jesus Christ risen from the dead sprung from the race of David." He then quotes part of a hymn that the community prayed. "If we have died with him, then we shall live with him. If we hold firm, then we shall reign with hi. If we disown him, then he will disown us. We may be unfaithful, but he is always faithful, for he cannot disown his own self." We can sing that hymn today as a great prayer of thanks for the faithful love that God has for us no matter what.