

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C  
2 Kings 5:14-17  
Ps 98: 1, 2-3, 3-4  
2 Timothy 2:8-13  
Lk 17:11-19

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In this third year of the 3-year Lectionary cycle, we've been working our way, generally, through the Gospel of Luke. Last week we started into chapter 17. The two Sundays' passages deal with the same topic but are very different from each another. Last week Jesus left us with a zinger: "We are unprofitable servants." Hmmpf! unprofitable servants. . . We don't even earn our keep! Today, Jesus heals ten people of a dread disease, and Luke observes how only one of them comes back to give thanks. The theme I see tying these two Gospels together is gratitude.

And each of them, appropriately, makes a different point about gratitude. In the story about Jesus and the 10 lepers, we could get bogged down in the details about only 1 out of 10 coming back, and that 1 being an outsider, a Samaritan. But I think that the essential truths to take away from this morning's Gospel are that God's mercy and generosity are bountiful and that the response we owe God should be love and gratitude.

Last week's Gospel posed a different question having to do with gratitude: What does God owe us for all the good and holy things we've done? And the answer is: absolutely, positively nothing. God calls us to relationship. God's covenant call is, "I will be your God and you will be my people," and God loves each one of us, as a member of God's holy people, dearly and with a fierce passion. BUT it is not a relationship of equals. God is God and we are not.

It makes me think of the story of the wealthy business executive who died. As he waited in line for his turn to stand before the judgment seat of God, he thought about all the money he had given to charities, and about how he had sat on the boards of so many charitable organizations and foundations. Now he was about to meet his Maker, and he was feeling pretty good about himself. Just then he noticed that two places ahead of him was Mother Theresa. As he turned the corner he heard the voice of God saying, "You know, Mother, you could have done more."

Now I don't for a moment believe that that story describes what awaits us in the afterlife, but it does illustrate the point of last week's Gospel. We are unprofitable servants. We have no right whatsoever to expect that God will ever say thank you to us for the good we do. We owe God all gratitude. God owes us no gratitude.

Similarly, we are sometimes – perhaps oftentimes – tempted to question the part God plays in the pain and sufferings of our life. Recently I ran across a character in a detective novel who prayed, “How long, O Lord, how long doth thy servant have to put up with this . . . stuff?” (She actually used a much stronger word than “stuff,” but this is church after all!) It’s a normal human response to get frustrated, and it’s a good and holy thing to bring our frustrations to Almighty God and to let off steam in our prayers, but let’s not delude ourselves into thinking that God owes us an explanation for any of the painful and sorrowful things we suffer. God doesn’t owe us explanations. Rarely does God give us explanations. God gives us his Son and [*pointing to the Cross*] the example of his Son. And the Holy Spirit gives us the virtue of hope. A few years ago our annual parish mission was on the topic of hope. One of the lessons we learned in that mission is the difference between hope and optimism. Optimism says that everything is going to turn out okay. Hope tells us that however it turns out will be okay.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, the order of priests and brothers who are commonly called Jesuits. One of the spiritual practices he taught is the daily examen [*spell it out*]. We’re used to the idea of an examination of conscience – you know: what we do when we prepare to confess our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The examen is NOT an examination of *conscience*, but an examination of *consciousness*, where we call to mind the things for which we owe gratitude to God.

I urge you this week to practice your own version of St. Ignatius’s examen. Set aside 5 minutes every night this week. Tell yourself as you crawl into bed, before you fall asleep, that you’re going to spend 5 minutes looking back on the day that’s just ended and thinking about all the things you’re grateful for. Like the Samaritan outcast in today’s Gospel, turn to Jesus and glorify God and give thanks. If you do that day after day for a little while, eventually you will be thanking God for both the good things and the bad things you will have encountered that day. And eventually if you listen, you will hear Jesus speak to you in words similar to the words he gave the Samaritan at the end of today’s Gospel: “Go to sleep. Get on with your life. Your faith has saved you. It’s going to be okay.”