

28th Sunday per Annum - C
II Kings 5:14-17;
II Timothy 2:8-13;
Luke 17:11-19
Little Flower - 10/13/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

In the ancient world, leprosy terrified people. Although it did not kill people, it was disfiguring and deforming. Likewise, the ancient Jews believed leprosy to be highly contagious. Therefore, those who contracted leprosy were expelled from family and community. When they were in public, they had to keep their distance from everyone else. Because family and community were the essence of Jewish life, lepers became the living dead, physically alive but relationally dead. When Jesus cured the ten lepers, then, he not only cured them of a physical disease. In effect, he gave them back their lives, their families, their community.

The healing of the ten lepers can be read and understood on two different levels.

On the first level, the story is a story about gratitude and ingratitude. Ten lepers were cured. Only one returned to thank Jesus, a Samaritan. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, the Jews looked down upon the Samaritans because they did not worship in Jerusalem. Likewise, we know that the Samaritans hated the Jews. This miracle is the second time in Luke's Gospel where a Samaritan is the hero of the story. The other, of course, is the parable of the Good Samaritan. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, it was not the Jewish priest or Levite who cared for the man who was victimized by robbers. In today's Gospel, it was not a member of the Jewish faith who returned to thank Jesus.

As Christians, we are called to live lives of gratitude. In our daily prayer, we should be consciously grateful to God for all God's gifts to us, especially for the special people in our lives. As we all know, life is very fragile. Just as we thank God for the special people in our lives, we should express our gratitude to them in word and deed. As Catholic Christians, our primary prayer is the Eucharist. The word *eucharist* means thanksgiving. It is at Eucharist that we primarily give thanks to God for all the gifts God has given us, including the special people in our lives but especially for the gift of Jesus Christ who makes all love possible. Finally, if we want to live lives of gratitude to God, we have to show that gratitude by sharing our gifts with others, especially with those in need.

Second, if we read the story on a deeper level, we understand that Jesus not only cured the ten lepers of a physical disease but gave them back their lives by enabling them to rejoin their family and community. In this sense, Jesus was not only a physical healer but a life-giver, which was his mission. As he said in John's Gospel, "*I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full*" [10:10].

If Jesus is life giving, we are called to be life giving as well. Fr. Marcian Strange, a Scripture scholar, made an interesting point about Jesus' power to work miracles. He suggested that we typically think of Jesus' power to work miracles as a special and separate power he had. He argued, however, that Jesus' power to work miracles was nothing other than the power of his divine-human love. Therefore, our love also has the power to be life giving, to work miracles in the lives of others.

In his First Letter, St. John wrote: "*The man who does not love is among the living dead*" [3:14; NAB, 1970]. In other words, love is life. To live, then, is to love. When we love others, we give them the gift of life empowering them to be loved and to love. Like Jesus himself, we become life giving.

My brothers and sisters, last Sunday was Respect Life Sunday. If we are called to be life giving, it seems to me that we first have to work to promote respect for all human life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.