

My Brothers and Sisters,

In today's first reading, Naaman the Syrian comes to thank Elisha for curing him of leprosy and to profess faith in the God of Israel. In today's Gospel, Jesus heals ten lepers, but only one comes back to thank him. This story suggests multiple themes.

The first theme is faith. The ten lepers were making an act of faith in Jesus by asking him to heal them. Jesus then asked them to put their faith into action by going and showing themselves to the priests. They did and were cured. We know that Jesus worked many miracles of healing in the Gospels. In almost every case, at the very least, people had to request to be healed or for someone else to be healed. Asking Jesus for healing was at least an implicit act of faith. They had to believe that Jesus had the power to heal, or there was no point in asking.

If we are people of faith, we need to have the confidence to ask God for what we need. Jesus said, "*Ask and you will receive...*" [Lk. 11:9]. At the same time, Jesus also tells us that God knows what we need. However, we should not expect to receive if we do not ask. Although our prayers are not always answered in the way we would like, asking always at least deepens our relationship with God [cf. Lk. 11:13].

The second theme is gratitude or ingratitude. This is the most striking theme in this Gospel passage. Jesus cured ten lepers, but only one came back to thank him. More importantly, the one who came back was a Samaritan, a foreigner. The other nine probably were so thrilled to be cured that they went off to celebrate their cure. They might not even have been ungrateful. They might have just forgotten to be grateful. Forgetfulness of God is a major problem today!

As important as it is to ask God for what we need and even want, it is even more important to thank God for what we have since we believe that all that we are and have are God's gifts to us. Of course, God's greatest gift to us is Jesus who make all love possible. This is why the Eucharist is so important to Catholics. The word *Eucharist* means thanksgiving. In other words, every Eucharist, every Mass, is a celebration of thanksgiving.

Most of us are not grateful enough for all that we have. Last Sunday we had a visitor from Uganda. When I talked to him at coffee and doughnuts, he was amazed at all that we have here in the United States. What a difference it would make in our lives if we all were grateful for what we have instead of bemoaning what we do not have. Equally importantly, if we live lives of gratitude, we want to share our gifts, gifts God has given us, with others. We want to share our time, talent, and resources with others.

My brothers and sisters, to understand the gift of healing they received, we have to understand leprosy in the time of Jesus. In those times, people believed leprosy to be highly contagious. Therefore, if someone was thought to be a leper, he or she could no longer live within the family or community. They literally were outcasts. Since family and community were everything for the Jews, they were the living dead in that society. When Jesus healed their physical illness, he gave them back their life. They were restored to their home, family, and community.

In his First Letter, St. John wrote that the person "*who does not love is among the living dead*" [3:14; NAB, 1970]. It is equally true that those who are not loved or who do not feel loved are also among the living dead. Therefore, it is imperative for us as Christians not only to love others but also to help them experience love. It is often said that we cannot give what we do not have. However, when it comes to love, we do not have what we do not give.