

This morning's Gospel reading is that well known account in St Luke's Gospel of the healing of ten men who had leprosy, only one of whom, a Samaritan, a despised foreigner, returned to give thanks. There is a lot more to this passage than a lesson in good manners.

So let us just take this passage a bit more slowly than we might otherwise do. Even in the modern world, leprosy still evokes strong reactions in the communities in which it is still found. It is still, mistakenly, assumed to be highly infectious. Sufferers are often seen to be under some kind of curse. Because of this sufferers are often banished from their communities. It is a disease that is feared and in its early stages often goes untreated. People are left disfigured, sometimes blind, sometimes losing limbs from associated infections. The leper was one to be kept at a distance.

Our story begins with ten lepers calling out to Jesus from a distance. For reasons we have already talked about that distance was more than just the number of meters that separated the group from Jesus. There was the even greater distance of exclusion, of alienation, of ignorance, of fear. These men are used to be ignored, used to being chased away, their cries for help being answered with insults, with sticks and stones.

So they stand at a distance and Jesus speaks across that distance; 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' In Jewish Law, the only way a sufferer could be restored to the life of the community was for them to be certified as clean by a priest. They are being invited back into the community from which they have long been excluded. We are told that they are cleansed. Nine of them head

off, whether they go to the priest or not we don't know and we hear no more about them.

But one of them comes back praising God, comes back and falls at Jesus' feet and thanks him. He thanks him. That is a translation of the Greek word used by Luke in his Gospel, εὐχαριστῶν , a word from which we derive our word eucharist, one of the words we use for the service of Holy Communion – eucharist, thanksgiving. The root of that word, εὐχαριστῶν , is the word χάρις, which we would translate as gift, as grace. There is a grace at the heart of true thankfulness, of gratitude. For when the man returns to Jesus, praising God, expressing his thankfulness, Jesus says to him, 'Rise and go, your faith has made you well.' Again, to go back to the Greek that Luke wrote in σέσωκέν, the perfect tense of σώζω, which we would translate as both heal and save – and the use of the perfect tense means an event in the past with lasting significance. That man, that Samaritan has been touched at a deeper level than the other nine. For whereas before he had, along with the others, called out to Jesus from a distance, now he draws near to Jesus. That gap, that distance of exclusion, of alienation, of ignorance, of fear had been closed.

Gratitude, a true and deep rooted thankfulness, has the power to change us. We celebrate the Holy Communion, the Eucharist, this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, as in bread and wine, we remember, profoundly and personally, the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a remembrance, a thanksgiving that flows over into commitment, as we pray in that lovely post communion prayer:

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise,
that when we were still far off
you met us in your Son and brought us home.
Dying and living, he declared your love,
gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.
May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;
we who drink his cup bring life to others;
we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.

There is a model here of thankfulness for all of life. We thank God for the many blessings we enjoy – our homes, our families, those we love. Our thankfulness should flow over into a real and genuine concern for those who have no homes, for those who have lost loved ones, for those who are alone.

May we who share Christ's body live his risen life;
we who drink his cup bring life to others;
we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.

This is Eucharist, this is Thanksgiving, this is Gratitude with Grace at its heart.

Or in the words of another ancient prayer

Grant O lord, that what we say with our lips,
We may believe in our hearts.
And what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives.