

## Twentyeighth Sunday of Ordinary Time

A Leper Saved

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Leprosy was a terrible curse in the ancient world. Not that it killed you. It was worse than that. It made you an object of revulsion and fear. Not only would people look the other way and scatter at your approach, you had to warn them you were coming by ringing a bell. It robbed you of family and friends. It made you dependent upon not the kindness of strangers but their pity. Even God was repulsed by you. You were impure. You defiled whatever you touched or whoever touched you. You were literally among the walking dead.

Jesus defined his mission in terms of people such as these. The leper, together with the blind and the lame, the sick and the sinner, the beggar and the possessed—all those deemed dirty, shameful, to be avoided, they were to be a new “chosen people” of a New Israel—an Israel that would be the mirror image of the religiously pure and the worldly wealthy and powerful. Not a noble Israel, not a pure Israel, but an inclusive Israel, a forgiving Israel. With God dwelling not in a temple but in a church—literally a gathering, not of saints, but of sinners aspiring to become saints.

Lepers were shunned and ostracized for fear that their leprosy was contagious. But in touching the lepers, it was not their leprosy that proved contagious but Jesus holiness, a holiness that made them whole. In the miracle stories in the Gospel Jesus is forever healing by reaching out and touching the untouchable, by looking eye to eye those overlooked by others, or worse by those others look away from. He focusing his attention of those others wish would just disappear.

This is not to say that Jesus had no standards. He would only accept those who accepted him, who believed what he taught and would put their faith in him. Where there was no faith, Jesus could work no miracles.

Even gratitude is no small task. Take today’s story. Ten are cured of leprosy, but only one is saved—the outsider, the Samaritan who returns in gratitude to thank Jesus for what he had done for him. What of the other nine? Why didn’t they also return to thank Jesus? Its interesting to speculate on their reasons. One, perhaps, was too overwhelmed to thank Jesus—he had to run home and share the good news with his family. One perhaps, never believed that Jesus had really healed him in the first place. He had healed himself. One perhaps had scores to settle with all those who had snubbed and shamed him all those many years. And one, perhaps, may have actually been angry at what Jesus had done to him. He hadn’t asked Jesus for healing only for his pity. What was he going to do now? Begging was all he knew—how was he supposed to live now?

This last possibility may seem pretty far fetched. But it can be hard to ask for help—it requires us recognizing that we need help, that we cannot take care of ourselves, by ourselves. And in my experience it’s even harder to accept that help once it is offered. For then we have to do something about it. We have to face what has paralyzed us, break the chains to which we are bound, summon the courage to live a new life. But

hardest of all, can be to thank those who've helped us. Its humbling to remind ourselves from whence we have come, and to recognize that we have not gotten where we are by ourselves. Ten lepers were cured, but only one was saved that day. It was Jesus' contagious holiness that cured the ten lepers, but it was that one leper's gratitude that saved him. Now we the audience, we identify with the grateful leper. If we could only be cured of our own leprosy, surely we would return to thank Jesus. We can hardly imagine being one of the other nine, who don't bother to thank Jesus.

But what of all that we've been spared? Would it not also be fitting to give thanks for all the curses that we do not need cured? All the blessings that we take for granted. All those things that are little things, only because we can take them for granted, but without which we would be hard pressed-- the blessings of family and friends, good health and paying jobs, our little community right here.

If we are not only to be cured but saved, we will also need to be grateful, grateful to all those with whom we pray here, grateful to all those blessings we tend to overlook and ultimately we need to be grateful to God, the source of all that is good, the ground of our very existence. If we can but remind ourselves, from time to time, of how we and all we hold dear depends on God for its very being, we may be blessed with a felt appreciation for just how much we are loved and cared for. In short we may feel that we number among the saved.

May we be blessed with eyes that can see and ears that can hear all that God is doing and calling us to do in the ten thousand things that go to make up of our daily lives. May we be a people of thanksgiving, who can welcome the needy, care for the broken and forgive the sinner because we too have so much to be grateful for.