

28TH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - C
“A Family Resemblance”

I've been troubled all week about a part of last Sunday's gospel story. It didn't make sense to me. Apparently, Jesus sees no reason to say thanks to the servant who waits on him because it's his job. And then Jesus goes on to say, *“When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have done what we are obliged to do.’”* I don't know about you, but that's troubling to me. I like a pat on the back once in awhile. I often thank the waitress who pours my water in a restaurant. Is Jesus saying I shouldn't do that because it's her job? And then, to top it all off, this week we have this familiar story about healing the ten lepers. On their way to show themselves to the priest, one notices he is cleansed. So he immediately returns to Jesus to say thanks. And Jesus says, *“Where are the other nine?”* I mean, didn't Jesus just do what we would expect him to do? See my problem?

Well, I did some checking and found a pretty good explanation. In this part of St. Luke's Gospel, Jesus is trying to form and shape the minds and hearts of his disciples so they will not be like the Pharisees, many of whom did things just for show. They wanted people to see how holy they were; to notice them when they were fasting, or to acknowledge their importance by sitting at the head table, sort of like spiritual and social show-offs. Jesus doesn't want us to do things for show. That isn't a worthy reason for doing anything, let alone to serve others in his name. Jesus didn't do things for show. We serve because we have been empowered to reach out to others from an energy inside of us that we received when we were born again into the life of grace; when we received the Holy Spirit. We serve because we love. It is a privilege we have because we share in the divine life of grace. We love because we have been given the gift of love from the one who is Love Itself.

Maybe St. Luke put these two stories back to back so we would see that being grateful is, in fact, a critical part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. When we are grateful, it means we acknowledge that the gifts we have been given are - gifts. We didn't earn them. You have heard me say time and time again that it's all gift, and that includes everything; our parents, our siblings, our spouse, our kids, our looks, our intelligence, our talents, not to mention the air we breathe and the whole world around us. People will tell me that I look good for being in my 70's. Well, it's not my fault. I had nothing to do with having oily skin and a full head of hair. But you should know that it's not my face that hurts. None of my three brothers is bald. Just last Thursday, my brother Vern and I were waiting to be seated for lunch at Mitzel's in Fife. A guy standing there said we looked like brothers. We can't help it. Family resemblance is a given. It's in the genes.

Now, having faith doesn't mean we have grateful hearts. All ten of the lepers had faith enough to go to the priest as Jesus had directed them to. But only one, upon realizing he was cleansed, returned to Jesus to give thanks. Only one made the connection between his healing and Jesus. His faith went to a deeper level and expressed itself in going back to say thanks to the one who had cleansed him. It's not that Jesus needed to hear his thanks. It's that the man needed to say it. Listen to this weekday preface we often use at Mass:

You have no need for our praise, yet our desire to thank you is itself your gift. Our prayer adds nothing to your greatness, but makes us grow in your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

My brothers and I share a family resemblance. As the family of God, shouldn't we also? Remember that passage in Mark where someone says to Jesus, "*Your mother, brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.*" And Jesus says, "*Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother.*" (Mk4:31-35) Well, as followers of Jesus, we should have a

family resemblance. Now it won't be anything physical, like the shape of our nose or the way we walk. Our family resemblance will come from what makes us the kind of people we are by what is inside of us. It will be those virtues and values, those inner ties that bind us together. "*See how those Christians love one another*" is a family trait. It will be those mannerisms that come from hearts imbued with the Holy Spirit of God's love and compassion: a willingness to forgive, to see goodness in others rather than faults, to respect the dignity of others regardless of social standing, looks, born or unborn. And a spirit of gratitude must be among the most important characteristics we share in common.

We are a grateful people as we gather here week after week to say thanks to God for everything we have and are, since it is all gift. It's not that we are doing God a favor by coming - some people seem to think they are honoring God by their presence - rather, we come because we need to say thanks. God is honoring us by his presence with us. We need to remember that God is God and we are not. We come to remember that we are graced, privileged to be disciples of Jesus, to have been called to share his message of peace and love to our cynical world. We come aware of our weaknesses and limitations to draw upon the transforming grace of the Eucharist so we can continue our mission in the world.

During October, all parishes are asked to do a headcount of those who come to Mass. We will be around 200 to 2500 each weekend. For every one who is here today, there are at least another two registered parishioners who are not here, not to mention the other Catholics who haven't bothered to register in the parish. Were not we all made clean in the waters of baptism? Where are the rest of us? May this Eucharist continue the transformation of our hearts.