

## A grateful heart

10 10 10

O God, forasmuch as without you  
we are not able to please you;  
mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit  
may in all things direct and rule our hearts.

My text may be found in today's gospel from Luke: 'Then one of them when he saw that he was healed turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.' (17 v 15 - 16)

As a young teacher in my first term at Davenant Foundation Grammar School, I was genuinely surprised when the Head Master, Roy Smith, thanked me for taking the First Year rugby team. I didn't know that he knew; I didn't expect to be thanked for doing something I saw as part of the job. But I did feel valued and appreciated, that what I was doing was being recognised. It was only a simple thing, to say thank you, but as a principle what Roy Smith did has stayed with me and as a teacher and a priest, I have always tried to thank people for what they are doing.

Today's miracle of healing by Jesus is a classic: ten for the price of one. Ten lepers in the borderland between Samaria and Galilee. Ten lepers hanging around on the outskirts of a village. Ten lepers brought together by what the Good News Bible quaintly translates as the 'dreaded skin disease'. Biblical leprosy, vitiligo,

and Hansen's disease, the modern form of leprosy, are not the same thing. The latter was believed incurable; the former could be cured. If you had the Biblical form of this skin disorder then symptoms might include white spots on a dark skin with this added bonus – the hair in the spots might also be white. Further symptoms might include swellings, scales, boils or pimples. This form of leprosy (vitiligo) had brought together nine Jews and a single Samaritan united by the ritual impurity they had in common – all now outcasts on the edge of society.

And then their chance came in the shape of Jesus passing through on his way to Jerusalem. Respectful, keeping their distance, they shout out to Jesus saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' And he did. He saw their predicament and he told them what to do. 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' At that very moment, they were made clean. The disfiguring disease was gone; their bodies were made whole again; their skin renewed like that of a child. But on their way away, one noticed what had happened to him; one turned back to Jesus; one came back to thank him for what he had done.

And this story of healing, this miracle, the source of one man's thanksgiving, makes me reflect on the value of saying thank you. A good dictionary can offer the reader so much more than a simple set of word definitions. So when I turned to my trusty two volume, 'Shorter Oxford English Dictionary', I found more than a definition but a challenging train of thought. Apparently thank and think are closely related Germanic verbs: thank proceeding from think in the sense that to thank is to be mindful of an obligation, to be aware of what one owes. So a prime meaning of 'thank' is the thought or recognition of what we have been given,

what we have received and therefore of the debt of gratitude we now owe. But thank is not simply a thought but a thought which leads to an action – the expression of our gratitude and an acknowledgement of our obligation to the giver.

Saying thank you, feeling and expressing our gratitude, is part of the right order of society. It is to see that we have been gifted and it is an acknowledgement to the person to whom we ought to feel grateful that we are indeed grateful. It makes us fully human to know that we are indebted to others and that we in turn will go on to deserve the thanks of others by what we do.

I admire the leper, the Samaritan who turned back to say thank you. I feel sorry for the nine Jews who didn't but I hope that when they showed themselves to their priests and were declared ritually clean, pure in body as they hoped to be pure in spirit, that they were grateful and felt true gratitude to the man who had made them clean again.

If we want to be fully what it is to be human, then we should be grateful for what we have received. We should say thank you for our many blessings and recognise and acknowledge the many ways so many folk make our lives better by what they do for us. We should say thank you to God our Father who has given us life and the chance to serve him by serving others. To say thanks shows that we think. Thank you for listening.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's Dinard*

*10<sup>th</sup> October, 2010*

H: Sermon 22: Grateful heart

