

HOMILY, THANKSGIVING DAY

Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul

November 24, 2011

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The annual American celebration of Thanksgiving is not a liturgical feastday, but a cultural opportunity to offer thanks. That's one reason why the liturgy is not about turkey and dressing, cranberry sauce in its various forms nor pumpkin pie. It is, however, about thanksgiving. Every Eucharist is about thanksgiving which is why we refer to the Great Prayer of the liturgy as the Prayer of Thanksgiving.

There certainly aren't any turkey's in the gospel passage this evening, but there is thanksgiving. We find Jesus literally walking along the borders of different regions, Samaria and Galilee, where it was not unusual to find hostility between Samaritans and Jews. However, when it comes to being a social outcast due to social diseases like the scourge of leprosy, the familiar phrase, "misery loves company" is certainly true. Samaritan or Galilean Jew makes no difference when you are cast aside by everyone because of your disease. In fact, as one author notes, these ten lepers were so miserable that the nine Galilean Jews completely overlooked the presence of their leperous Samaritan companion. When you're down and out, you're down and out.

Along comes Jesus who is moved with compassion. The lepers forget all about their nationalistic leanings, and cry out to Jesus for mercy. His response is quick, and within the boundaries of local ritual as he orders them to go and show themselves to the priests, a typical part of being healed.

One of them, the Samaritan, upon realizing that he has been cured, returns to give Jesus thanks. Now, it's interesting to note that Jesus doesn't

revoke his cure of the other nine because they did not return. They go on their way truly cured. But this one, unexpectedly a Samaritan, returns to Jesus, a Jew, to give thanks.

Healing and gratitude arise out of this poor man's recognition of what Christ has done for him. He lets barriers of nationalistic pride and suspicion simply fall by the wayside along with his leprosy, and gives thanks to God. Faith has allowed this man to cry out to Jesus. Faith has brought about his healing, and now faith has brought about gratitude.

What we celebrate this year at Thanksgiving, is our faith that serves us well in the midst of many societal issues such as increasing unemployment, thirty million Americans who have no insurance and all of us standing on the brink of another great war. How can we be grateful? Our gratitude arises out of God's gift of faith given to us, and our nurturing that faith through prayer, sacraments and service. It is this cultivated gift of faith that gives us eyes with which to recognize God's other gifts to us beginning with the gift of life. That same gift of faith brings us continually back to the Eucharist to offer God through Jesus and in the Holy Spirit our gratitude for his life in and among us. In the words of the preface for the liturgy tonight, "our prayer is itself, O God, your gift." For this and so many other gifts we can call out, "Thanks be to God!"