



BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Thanksgiving Day
November 28, 2024
Sister Belinda Monahan

Sirach 50:22-24
Psalm 145:2-3, 4-5,6-7, 8-9, 10-11
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Luke 17:11-19

As I was pondering today's readings in preparation for these reflections, I was simultaneously putting the evening prayer readings together for the month of December. One of the Sunday Advent reflections- I don't remember which one, you'll have to wait to find out- referenced practices of gratitude. The author suggested several techniques including the practice of mindfulness or journaling. If you're listening to the evening prayer reflections carefully for the next few weeks, don't be surprised when you don't hear these suggestions, because they didn't quite ring true for me, so I didn't include them in the section we'll be reading.

It's not that we don't all have an abundance of things to be grateful for: we all have a place to live, and ample food, and people who care for us, and a community who supports us. I'm sure each of us could produce an individual list of our blessings as well.

And we all have struggles too: changes in our minds and bodies as we age, grief that comes with the many losses that we have faced and continue to face, the ongoing work of striving to discerning who we are and how we will be together as community as we move into the future. And again, we each have our own individual list of personal struggles.

There is actual evidence that, while practicing gratitude is on the whole good for us, forcing ourselves into it sometimes has the effect of glossing over things that need our attention and can have the result of making us feel worse rather than better. But what does that mean on a day like Thanksgiving, especially when confronted with these scriptures which strongly point to the need for gratitude?

Both the second reading and the Gospel speak directly to this idea of Thanksgiving. Paul thanks God daily for the grace bestowed on the church in Corinth and Jesus commends the Samaritan for returning to thanks to God. Even the Gospel acclamation tells us that we are to give thanks to God always. Are the readings today supposed to turn us all into Pollyannas?

In that case, the last line of the gospel; Jesus's remark to the Samaritan who returned to give thanks seems somewhat pointless. The Gospel tells us that all ten lepers were cleansed—it even uses the word healed. If all today's readings are suggesting is that we need to practice gratitude then, why does Jesus remark on this man's return?

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I think it's because these readings call us to move beyond gratitude—to look past the things, and even events and people for which we are grateful—to look beyond them to see God as the source of that gratitude. The Samaritan leper's expression of gratitude to Jesus—his explicit recognition of and to the person from whom his healing comes—leads to not only his cleansing or his healing but to his salvation. Does the fact that the other nine did not return to give thanks to Jesus mean that they were not grateful? Of course not. But they were so focused on what they had been given—a return to health, getting to go home to their families, being part of their community again—that they forgot to return to the source of their gratitude. In paying too much attention to the gifts, they forgot to pay attention to the giver.

And why does this mean for us? I think if we practice gratitude not just for the gifts but for the giver. If we look not just at the blessings, but past them to their source, if we look to God as the source of the good... Then just maybe in all of the messy moments of our lives, we can also see God present in those moments as well.

This is why we gather around this table weekly for Eucharist—a word the origin of which may be related to the word for “Thanks.” To encounter a God who loves us so much that he entered into the messiness of our lives and who shares his life with us.

That's worth giving thanks for.