

A couple of weeks ago, I dropped my car at the dealership for service, and took a courtesy shuttle home. The courtesy driver was an immigrant from Algeria. We talked about his family, his aspirations, and the hours he spends working and studying. Then I asked him, "Do you miss Algeria?"

"Sometimes I miss some things about Algeria," he said, "It will always be my home, and I have a lot of family there."

There was a pause in our conversation as he thought about his home country. Then he said, "I would never want to move back there. This is the greatest country on earth to live. In Algeria, I thought it would be amazing if I could ever afford even an old car. Here everyone has a car. Soon, we will be buying a house with a yard. I could never hope to own land in Algeria. Here, I can work my way through college. There, only the rich people can go to college. This is the greatest country. I want my children to grow up with the opportunities I found here."

I was struck by the contrast between his view of the state of the United States, and the way politicians are describing things. I'm not blind to the issues that need to be addressed. What he saw was what is right with the United States, rather than describing everything that is wrong. He was grateful for things that people who are born and raised here often forget to be grateful.

Ten people suffering from the terrible disease of leprosy approached Jesus as he was on his way to Jerusalem and asked for healing. Jesus sent them to the priest, and as they were on their way, all ten were cleansed of leprosy. Notice that Luke does not say that all ten were made well. They were cleansed of leprosy, but they were not made well. There was still a disease far more destructive than leprosy that had attached itself to them.

One returned to Jesus, and fell down at Jesus' feet, and thanked him. To this one, Jesus said, "Arise and go your way. Your faith has made you well." It was only when he returned to give thanks to Jesus that he was made well. There was something about this act of gratitude that brought a deeper healing than the cleansing of leprosy. In this show of gratitude, there was a restoration of the relationship between the man and God, and in that restoration, the man was made well.

So what made the difference between the nine, and the one who returned with gratitude. It has been suggested that the nine were too caught up in the ritual for cleansing to return. They had to be examined by the priest. Then they were supposed to offer a sacrifice for their cleansing. Some have suggested that the formalities of the law kept them from showing their gratitude. It has been said that they were too bound by the law to display the appropriate thanks for their cleansing.

There is an ever present danger of formalism in religion. It is too easy to perform a perceived duty while failing to allow that duty to penetrate our hearts. This would not apply only to the Jewish people of the first century. We've done it in the church through the ages. Whether it was the sale of indulgences, or telling people that all they needed to do is to say one simple prayer, every generation of the church fallen prey to formalism.

I do not think that the difference between the nine who did not return and the one who did had its root in religious formalism. Formalism is a symptom of a deeper problem. I think Luke gives us an important clue when he tells us that the one who returned was a Samaritan. Samaritans were not morally superior to the Jewish people. He did have one advantage. He was not expecting to benefit from the coming of the Jewish Messiah. He had not taken for granted that when the Messiah came it would be a good thing for him as a Samaritan. The fact that the Jewish Messiah would do good things for him was a new discovery. It opened his eyes to the vast generosity of the Kingdom of Heaven. One who had been on the outside of Jewish Messianic hope became a beneficiary of his Kingdom. The other nine were accustomed to the idea that the Messiah would bring healing to them. It was what he was supposed to do. They were cleansed but not made well. Their relationship with God had not been set right.

One of the dangers that those who have been raised in the church, or have been part of the church for many years face is that we lose the sense of awe when we speak of God's grace offered to us in Christ Jesus. We study the Bible and intellectually discover that we have been saved by grace through faith, but that statement has lost its surprise. When we say that "For us and for our salvation, Jesus came down from heaven, was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried," we take God's plan for our salvation for granted. We don't allow it to penetrate our hearts. If we lose the surprise of the grace of God offered in Christ Jesus we will fall into ingratitude.

Our Lord showers the world with his grace in hope that it will not only bring cleansing, but that it will make us well. Jesus reached out to all ten of those men suffering with leprosy who approached him that day. He cleansed each one of them, hoping that in their cleansing they would find the gratitude that would allow them to be made well. In His generosity, God continues to reach out to us, hoping that we will return to Him with gratitude in our hearts.

How has God been reaching out to you? I know that He has been reaching out to all of us with the reading of His word. Don't lose the surprise that God has chosen to speak to us. He has been reaching out to us in the sacrament of his body and blood. One of the graces that God has given to me is seeing some of the youth present part of the teaching at our GIFT program. It's like seeing the teachings through fresh eyes.

How else has God been reaching out to you? Perhaps you have experienced a physical healing. Perhaps you have had a relationship healed. Perhaps you have been met with God's provision in your finances that you never would have expected.

As Christians we know that every good thing is a gift from God. Every meal we enjoy, every note of music we hear, the beauty we see in the world around us, all come from God. We know this with our intellects, but do we let that knowledge sink into our hearts? The Lord keeps showering with grace upon grace.

May we never grow so accustomed to the good things that God has given us that we take them for granted. If we want to be made well, if we want a new and fresh relationship with our Father in heaven, we can find it when we return to Him with gratitude. Never let yourself get used to the goodness of God revealed in creation, or in the word spoken in scripture, or in

reconciling you to Himself through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Instead keep returning to offer thanks for the great grace he has shown.