

Sunday between 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> October [28]

Luke 17: 11-19

How often do we notice a lack of manners in other people? Many of us are sticklers for Ps and Qs at home and it is often one of the most important things we teach children in our care so that they are always polite when they deal with people.

Some of us are particularly sensitive to it in ourselves and other people and we may have to occasionally point this out when experiencing a lack of manners from someone else. Imagine a little boy who was given an orange by a man. The boy's mother asked, "What do you say to the nice man?" The little boy thought and handed the orange back and said, "Peel it." That sort of thing is not very polite but unfortunately we do see such poor manners from time to time.

Why is it so important, though? Well saying thank you in particular is a sign of respect and an acknowledgement that the person towards whom the gratitude is directed has put someone else first, even if just for a second, and we recognise that it is both kind and unnecessary for others to do that. That's what makes a kindness special, it's when someone puts someone else's needs or desires before their own when they didn't have to do it. We teach such manners to children because we want to teach them gratitude. We want them to say thank you when a waiter in a restaurant brings them food or when someone holds the door open for them in a shop or when anyone hands them something, whether they want to receive it or not. We want them to say thank you for the little things in order that they appreciate the bigger things and so that expressing gratitude is second nature.

But what about the rest of us, it's all very well insisting our children mind their Ps and Qs but do we get a bit slack at it ourselves as we get older? The number of people you might see who will walk through a door being held open by someone in a shopping centre without the slightest acknowledgement that they are there suggest we might not all place so high a value on manners. And what about how our manners change when dealing with the people closest to us as opposed to strangers? Most of us say thank you to complete strangers in case they think we're rude but may not always make the time to appreciate our loved ones in the same way. And perhaps it is worth reflecting on whether our relationship with God suffers for the same reason.

It seems that God displays unconditional love for us sufficiently that we find ourselves worshipping together here but do we really thank God, really give thanks for all that we have received by grace?

Today's gospel is all about gratitude in the face of healing and how few expressed their gratitude to the one who healed. It's a tricky one because if we're not careful we can read this gospel in such a way as puts Jesus in a slightly selfish light. Does he express disappointment about the 9 who went away healed without a word of thanks because he only performed the healing to obtain adulation and attention from others? That is not Jesus' way at all. In so many other healings he tells the healed person to go and tell no one of their encounter. In the healing of the man by the pool Jesus slips away immediately so that when asked the man had no idea who had in fact healed him. It is difficult to imagine that Jesus was looking for self-gratification in expecting the others to have said thank you.

It is more likely, that it is the inner response which causes a person to say thank you that Jesus felt was lacking. The lepers knew that Jesus hadn't used medicine to make them well, they had called him master, they obviously knew of him and his reputation as a spiritual healer. So there was no doubt that these men were asking for God to heal them and believed that it was God who was responsible. The one leper who turned back to say thank you, did so by praising God in a loud voice all the way. It wasn't Jesus the man the others were ignoring by going straight back to their everyday lives, it was God.

Now we all understand why they were in a rush to get on with their lives, these men had been separated from their families for we don't know how long, they needed to get the all clear from the temple before they could go home and they were beyond desperate to restart their lives. It is understandable. But being healed is as much about our spiritual health as it is about our physical health. Being in a right relationship with God is part of feeling well. Jesus was disappointed not for a missed opportunity for some attention for himself but rather he was disappointed on behalf of the lepers for a missed opportunity to understand what had happened between them and God.

How many of us are quick to pray for our needs, to cry out to God in despair when things go wrong, perhaps some of us only pray when there is something we need? Conversely, how many of us pray in grateful thanksgiving for the blessings we receive with the same fervour, or even give thanks when prayers are answered? Sometimes we will but often we won't. We will forget or get distracted. When everything turns out ok the issue seems far less urgent. We regularly make appointments to see doctors when we are ill, and make follow up appointments when we are not better and even make complaints if we don't think things are being dealt with quickly enough, but how many of us, when we get well, send a card, or make a phone call, in any other way acknowledge that we are grateful that everything has worked out in the end? Some will but many won't.

And yet if there is anything we have to be grateful for it is our relationship with God, by grace, through the sacrifice of Jesus. Without this relationship where would we be when we want to cry out in need? Without Jesus' sacrifice on the cross would we ever have become children of God always free to address him as our father?

And so it is that the healed Samaritan leper teaches us to take nothing for granted, he reminds us that there is nothing more important than our relationship with God, whatever our situation, and he encourages us to give thanks with the same ferocity and zeal as we cry out in pain. Because God hears all our prayers and when we are vulnerable and ask for help we honour God by our realisation that God is almighty and we do nothing for ourselves, yet we also give honour when we give thanks as we come into a right relationship with our God who gives unceasingly, blesses us beyond what we ask for and loves us unconditionally.