

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year C)

October 13, 2019

2 Kings 5:14–17 • 2 Timothy 2:8–13 • Luke 17:11–19

I.

Yesterday, five hundred people took part in the diocesan pilgrimage to the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC.

This event was a preparation for the bicentennial of the Diocese of Richmond that we will commemorate in 2020.

The National Shrine has over fifty chapels dedicated to Mary, each honoring the Mother of God under a different title.

These titles are devotions to Mary associated with particular ethnic communities.

During the course of the pilgrimage, Bishop Knestout led prayers in some of these chapels that have particular significance for our diocese:

1. Our Lady of Antipolo for Filipino Catholics
2. Our Lady of La Vang, for Vietnamese Catholics
3. Our Mother of Africa, for black or African American Catholics
4. Our Lady of Guadalupe, for Hispanic Catholics

The National Shrine depicts the many faces of Mary, which are the many of the Church.

II.

Interestingly,
these chapels express the two themes found in today's First Reading and Gospel:

Foreigners who give thanks to Almighty God.

The various ethnic communities I mentioned, or organizations representing them, built those chapels in the Shrine.

These were expressions of gratitude to God for his work among them.

This is what Bishop Knestout sought to highlight by visiting and praying in those chapels.

III.

In the First Reading, Naaman, a general in the Syrian army and a leper, insists on giving thanks to God by offering gifts to the prophet Elisha, who has facilitated his miraculous healing the Jordan River.

Naaman's act of thanksgiving is a profession in God, the only God:

“Now I know that there is no God in all the earth,
except in Israel.
Please accept a gift from your servant.”

Namaan's next gesture, in response to Elisha's refusal to accept a gift, tells us what thanksgiving to God is about: staying close to the source—to the Lord.

“If you will not accept,
please let me, your servant,
have two mule-loads of earth,
for I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice to any other god
except to the LORD.”

When it comes to prayer
—communicating with God—
we tend to focus on petition:
asking for something.

But there are other kinds of prayer.

In the tradition of Christian prayer there are four other categories: blessing and adoration, intercession, praise, and thanksgiving.

Significantly, only one of those categories can put us at the center: petition.

Thanksgiving, especially, takes the focus off of us and places it on God.

In thanking God for what we already have,
and thanking him for what he has already done,
we acknowledge God's providence or care for us.

God may not always give us what we want,
but certainly he gives us whatever we need—
what we need to accomplish his will.

This is the gist of the Our Father;
it's a prayer that asks for whatever we need to carry out the Father's,
which includes honoring God in all things,
and forgiving those who have hurt us.

Thanksgiving helps us to stay close to God.

In the Gospel, only one of the ten lepers—the foreigner—
returns to Jesus to thank God for having been cured:

“One of them, realizing he had been healed,
returned, glorifying God in a loud voice;
and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.”

Perhaps we can see in this reading a spiritual “disease”
that continued to afflict the other lepers, as it does us: entitlement.

Perhaps, with their being Jewish,
the other lepers did not grasp the sheet gratuitousness of the miracle,
whereas the Samaritan apparently did.

We can safely presume that the other lepers were happy to have been cured—
who wouldn't be?

But they were, to a certain degree,
so absorbed with their own good fortune that they forgot about God.

In returning to Christ,
the Samaritan elected to stay close to the source,
to the one who healed him.

IV.

For most people, offering thanks is a discipline.

Whereas we easily
—perhaps, instinctively, ask for things, either for ourselves or others—
we are slower to express gratitude.

So, carving our time to pray in thanksgiving to God is a path to spiritual growth.

In particular, it's worth pointing out that the period of time that follows the
reception of Holy Communion is directed to adoration and thanksgiving.

(Remember that petition has its own place in Mass:
the Universal Prayer.)

Perhaps we think that, in receiving Communion, we are as close to God as can be,
so we have the best chance of getting what we want!

Instead, Namaan the Syrian, and the Samaritan leper, propose a different attitude:
thank to God for what we have.

It's a profession of faith in God.

An expression of love to God, who provides for our needs.