

Many years ago I was serving in a Mechanized Infantry unit on an exercise in Germany where we were partnered up with a unit from the UK. After a phase of the exercise we took a break and held an After Action Review. After several hours of self-castigation by the Battalion Leadership the UK Regimental Sergeant Major stood up to speak. This is what he said. "You Yanks just put on a bloody good show for the past three days. But in here all you have done is criticize your selves and never once have you acknowledged what you did right or how well your people preformed."

He was 100% correct. We never talked about the Soldiers working all night on the vehicles, the initiative shown by Junior Officers and NCOs to make up for the normal confusion and miscommunication that happens in tactical operations. We failed to be grateful for the hard work and sacrifice of our people that caused us to be successful in the exercise. He did cause the Battalion to modify its behavior, at least until we returned to Fort Hood.

In today's Gospel Jesus is going to Jerusalem and 10 Lepers call out to him begging for mercy, begging for healing. Isn't that the same thing that we do in prayer? Don't we ask for mercy for our loved ones and for our selves? We don't have leprosy, we have something worse, we have sin. Particularly those chronic sins that gradually corrupt our souls as leprosy corrupts the body, those habitual insults to the love of God that we don't pay any attention to because they are so ingrained in our lives.

As Our Lord healed the lepers on their way to the priests, he forgives and heals us on our journey through life through the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. After we are healed, most of us, most of the time are one of the nine lepers. We just continue with our lives. We don't make any changes, we don't try something new, we just get back into our routine. Of course our routine probably either includes or encourages our chronic sins, but we don't worry about it because think that we can always get back to Reconciliation at a later date, forgetting that presuming God's mercy is in and of itself a grave and serious sin.

What causes then us to change our behavior? What is the interior force that moves us to exercise the self discipline we so desperately need to put aside all of those friendly bad habits, those chronic sins and pick up the mantel of Christ?

The first thing that comes to mind is grace and that is absolutely a large part of the answer. Without grace, without the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives we aren't capable of love, we can't pray, we can't recognize our sins and we most definitely can't find our way here into God's house to worship him.

But there also has to be an additional interior movement on our part, a movement that separates us from the other nine lepers and sends us back to Christ in our hearts, in our souls. That interior movement is gratitude. Look around the church. I'm willing to bet that we aren't missing any meals and that we have homes to live in made of something other than cardboard. We have incomes, careers, vehicles, all the trappings of modern life in the United States.

Do any of us think we have these things just because we earned them? Yes we did the work, but don't the parents of families in Sub-Saharan Africa work hard as well? We have great health care, their children die of diseases we cure with a shot or a pill. Why did we get to live here instead of over there? Aren't those families just as deserving as our families? What we have, where we live, our skills, our knowledge, our education, our health and most importantly our faith are all gifts from God.

I'm not contrasting this family's situation to ours in order to give you a good case of Catholic guilt. I'm making the comparison to demonstrate just how much God has blessed each and every one of us.

Real gratitude to God for his gifts causes us to change our lives. But we are afraid of the change, afraid that all we are doing is giving stuff up without anything in exchange. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In being grateful to God for his many gifts we are seeking a closer, more intimate relationship with him. We are seeking sanctity. Sanctity is giving something up for God and in exchange gaining something else. In giving up our favorite sins, we gain peace of conscience. In letting go of a grudge we get to enjoy a relationship. In letting a perceived or real injustice to our person go by, we find ourselves less stressed and able to concentrate on those things in our lives that are truly important.

All ten lepers were cured, but only one received the gift of salvation, the one who took the time to prostrate himself before Jesus and thank him for the gift of his cure. The one who by his gratitude showed that he was willing to change his life to be worthy of the gift he had received.

Let me play the role for you today that that UK Regimental Sergeant Major played for me so many years ago. Yes the world is a mess, yes there is another media feeding frenzy every week, yes the loons are loose in the capital, but at the end of the day look around your home, look at your family and friends, look at the gift of your faith. Be grateful to God for the many gifts he has blessed us with and don't be afraid to show your gratitude by giving up those few things, that if we are honest with ourselves, are actually interfering with the peace and joy God has ready for those who are willing to receive his love.