

28th Sunday (C)

9th October 2016

'Thanks be to God!'

2Kings 5: "accept a present from your servant."

Ps 97: Ring out your joy!

2Tim 2: Remember the Good News that I carry

Lk 17:11-19: Finding himself

cured, one of them turned back ... and thanked Him.

When I was in seminary, training to be a priest (the memories of which are now becoming ever more distant ... It was over 17 years ago, now, that I left the English College in Rome), one of my favourite moments of the week was the Sung Vespers. On Sunday evening at 7.05pm we sang Evening Prayer: pretty much every word of which was indeed sung, not said ... And it ended with the words, "Go in the peace of Christ," sung by the deacon — with the congregation's response, "Thanks be to God." And I will always remember how the echo of those words, "Thanks be to God" would echo round the high-walled seminary chapel, before only gradually dying away ... I thought of those words as rising up to heaven from our chapel, a perfect prayer of praise: "Thanks be to God."

Giving thanks is the very first thing we should think of when it comes to our faith, and our prayer. Long before our prayers are about 'asking for things,' they should be

prayers of praise and thanksgiving. If you notice, that's the way it is with the 'Our Father' — it doesn't begin 'Our Father, Give us this day our daily bread,' does it? It begins with the love and worship of God who is "in heaven," whose name is to "be held holy," whose kingdom is paramount, "on earth as in heaven." If you wanted another example, take the Mass. The Mass is not mostly about our coming to ask God for the things we need, the things we are worried about, the concerns we have ... We *do* bring those things to God; they are in our hearts, and some of them we express in the weekly Bidding Prayer. But it's not the 'asking' that comes first and foremost when we come together to celebrate our faith: first, we come simply to give God thanks and praise! In fact, the very word 'Eucharist' means 'to show good favour,' or more simply, 'to give thanks.' That's what we're about when we come to Mass: as God's special creatures, as the dearest part of His creation, we are here together to sing and praise His name for His being God, the God who made us. It ties up, doesn't it, with last Sunday's Gospel: 'we are doing no more than

our duty,' when we honour and worship God for being God. The offering of the Mass is not principally about 'what we get out of it' or 'enjoying it' as such ... Sometimes Mass may be more jolly than other times; sometimes simpler, sometimes more lavish ... but it is always something holy and perfect for God. Mass is that offering of ourselves, our little lives, in union with the One who makes it possible for man to be in touch with God, Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus is our thanksgiving perfect: only in Jesus can we have the perfect prayer which is the Mass. The Mass should instil in us an attitude of thanksgiving, for all we have, our life and all we are.

It's this attitude of thanksgiving that comes to us in the Gospel this evening/morning. Jesus is staggered when the other cleansed lepers do not also return to give thanks. To give thanks is good and natural ... it is clearly rude and ungrateful not to say 'thank you' for the beautiful and good things that come our way. And yet, as Jesus's encounter shows, it is all too common to find in life an unwillingness to say 'thank you': sadly, it sums up man's attitude to God,

that many will not give praise and honour to the God who made us. You could imagine Jesus saying, of the world of today: "Were not all 7 billion given their being by me? — the others who haven't come to thank Me, where are they?" Receiving without giving thanks seems the most ungrateful thing ... and yet it is precisely what we are often tempted to do in regard to God: to take the life He has given us and not come back to Him every day to give thanks as we should. Many, many people in this world are doing just that ... let's want never to one who neglects our thanks and praise; let's never take this life for granted; let's always be those who devote themselves to prayer, and to the most perfect offering of prayer, the Mass, to the praise and glory of God.

And may we be people who habitually say 'thank you' to one another, not taking anyone else for granted either. The same attitude of thanks to God will help us also give thanks to each and for each other ... This approach to life will most certainly bring us greater peace. What should I give thanks for today? What am I most in need of saying 'thank you' to God for, this very day ... ? Let me think ...