

Blessed be God who animates our lives and blessed are those who give thanks to the Lord always and everywhere. AMEN

One of my favorite words is liminal. It has to do with thresholds and borders and crossings. For me it brings to mind the thin spaces of Celtic mysticism where earth and heaven kiss...for me this is the space we inhabit when we follow Jesus, when we summon our courage and hope to climb another mountain of oppression to arrive at the summit of liberation.

Our faith is liminal. It is the threshold to the holy. It also supports us, encourages us, assures us in these spaces. It is both transformational and transforming.

Our faith, the large topic of the Gospel last week makes another appearance today. To one of the ten healed lepers, a Samaritan no less, Jesus says, your faith has made you well. Jesus says this not just because of a healing but because the lone Samaritan leper gave thanks, turned around and gave thanks to the lord our God.

Jesus is in the liminal space between samaria and galilee. Geography tells us there is little there and yet it is where the journey toward Jerusalem is fully charted. Jesus is in the liminal space between birth and death, between this life and the next...and so are we...

And so are the 10 lepers, though perhaps only the Samaritan realizes the true significance of this moment. The Samaritan fully inhabits this liminal space, this tension between disease and wellness, between untouchable and touchable, between marginalized and included.

This healing miracle story is not only about healing, causing sores to disappear and visible health to return. This miracle story is about wholeness and holiness. For that is what Jesus teaches us that faith does...it makes us whole, holy one.

How does faith do this? Well the simple answer is we don't know? it is God's holiest of mysteries. But the more intriguing answer and formational one is that Faith causes us or calls us to exercise our faith, to practice it, that it might be firmer, deeper, unshakable.

If faith is the greatest of gifts of God then gratitude is our faithful practice. Gratitude is to faith as breath is to life. And yet we often fail to fathom the holy work of gratitude. It takes encouragement and practice.

Gratitude, giving thanks, is a good and joyful thing always and everywhere.

That is what Eucharist means, thanksgiving, and our faith calls us to live eucharistic lives in addition to participating corporately in the holiest of sacraments each week.

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That is the difference between healing a disease and salvation of a soul! Thanksgiving. Eucharisteo means give thanks. The Eucharist is one of our primary sacraments. It grounds our faith, it affirms our faith, it elevates our faith. In giving thanks we are reminded who and whose we are; we are reminded of our earthly smallness in favor of our heavenly magnitude.

This causes me to ask what does a Eucharistic life look like? It would seem to be the incarnation and embodiment of faith itself.

Many of the saints are models of this life of praise and thanksgiving of God and God's magnificent creation. We have recently spent time thinking about St Francis and not coincidentally he has a story of lepers and wholeness as well. Francis would always consider his ministry to the lepers his true conversion and expression of complete faith. In offering mercy and touch to the lepers instead of walking by or avoiding them, Francis became the instrument of God's mercy and made them well, spiritually.

He would continue to express gratitude for his calling and expression thereof. He gave thanks for the opportunity, the opportunity, to embrace the lepers, to touch the untouchables! The leper community would also learn that Francis was as Jesus come among them bringing mercy and love and compassion and they too would give thanks.

A more recent or modern healing of leper hero is Dr. Paul Brand. Dr. Brand shunned fame and fortune as a brilliant doctor in favor of working on leprosy in India. The great irony of the focus of his gratitude is that it was for pain! "Thank God for pain! I cannot think of a more valuable gift for my leprosy patients." When most doctors and people go to great lengths to eliminate pain. Dr. Brand realized that leprosy patients become increasingly worse due to the fact the disease itself silences nerve endings, unlike many disease progressions, leprosy progressed because pain was not felt.

We forget sometimes that this life is not about avoidance of discomfort. Faith teaches us to embrace sorrow and joy, flow mingled down. Our wholeness our completeness depends intimately on our gratitude for all parts of our lives which springs from awareness and realization.

This practice of giving thanks causes an awareness which is the opposite of denial and numbness. As we grow more fully into ourselves as God would have us be, we offer thanks for the very process of salvation, the good and the less good.

As the 10 lepers walked away from Jesus they felt, realized they were healed. 9 kept walking, 1 turned around. And it is in the turning, the gratitude to and for our Savior, for his new life, that Jesus identifies faith as the healing energy. Numb to pain no more,

There are many more stories of faith and gratitude and wholeness and holiness. Perhaps you are thinking of some yourselves. For today, I would like us to hold the story of the Samaritan leper and the conversion in gratitude as one we might model and

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cherish as we journey to the altar, as we move in our own liminal space, in our own thin space with our own brokennesses and dis-eases.

When we lift up our hearts and give thanks to the Lord our God, we are transformed more toward and into holiness, We are moving toward that holy mountain where there is no more disease. As Richard Rohr has pointed out, there is a leper and a wolf inside each of us, a place where we rage, a place where we hurt, a place where we have come to not hurt and therefore to be slowly rotting.

When we embrace that broken part of ourselves and embrace suffering others, we act as Jesus did as St Francis did, as Dr. Brand and Mother Theresa and as so many other saints just like you and me have done. When we give thanks for the call to do so, for the opportunities to be more real, more whole, our faith is making us well.

may we fully inhabit that liminal space between life on earth and eternal life. may we give thanks to the Lord our God for the grace to do so.