

## AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

I was once in a leprosarium near Manilla in the Philippines. I had been taken by a Salvation Army team just before Christmas. We sang carols and left a gift for each patient. Two people have stayed with me. A senior lady beckoned me over to her bed and indicated that she wanted a photo taken, so that it could be sent to her daughter. I touched her hair and smiled before I did as she had asked. Later we went from bed to bed in the veterans' ward handing out a copy of the War Cry, a cake of soap and a tin spoon all in a small plastic bag. There was only a lump in the bed at the left side back and somehow we passed it by. As we were leaving, I turned to see the man in the bed next to the 'lump', walk on his near toeless feet and put his gift under the pillow of his companion who had not received anything. It was then that I began to understand what one of my responses to Christmas could be – gratitude.

With leprosy comes the inability to feel pain. While we may take multiple ways to avoid pain, there is an implicit gift in pain that acts as an indicator that something is amiss. In Biblical times it was a much-feared disease. A leper wasn't allowed to come within 6 feet of anyone including his own family. Lepers lived outside the camp in a community of outcasts. As far back as Leviticus the Israelites were given instructions about how they were to react. They were told to go and show themselves to a priest. He would provide a certificate verifying their condition.

Jesus was entering a village on the Samaria-Galilee border when he came across a group of lepers. They cried out, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.' Jesus had mercy. Jesus is not afraid of contamination. He does not regard holiness as separation, as did the Pharisees. He rejects the notion that external things defile or pollute a person's essential being. In contrast to the traditional view, Jesus regards holiness or wholeness as contagious. He tells the lepers to do what their Scriptures said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priest.' He doesn't use healing to bring others under the spell of his own charisma. He merely sends them on.

It is to their eternal wellbeing that they do as he said – they go. Their going, their trust, their acting on his command activates their healing. Only one leper, recognizing his healing, returns to give thanks and praise. Amazing for he is the enemy – a Samaritan. How come that the one most alienated was the one most grateful? There is an aching sadness in Jesus' question, 'But the other nine, where are they?' He had empowered them but so quickly they forgot. To this one grateful soul Jesus says, 'On your way, your faith has healed you.' Was it that 10 were cleansed but that only one was healed?

Luke challenges our assumptions about those who are 'saved' and assures us that spiritual wholeness depends not on birthright, but on our response to God's grace. By focusing on the faith of the Samaritan, considered unclean and unsaved by Jewish religious authorities, Luke emphasizes that there is no one outside God's invitation to new life. All that's required is our consent.

What excuses do we have for not being thankful?

- God helps those who help themselves
- God is God – God knows I'm grateful
- I'll thank God later – I've a lot on my plate right now
- Anyway, I'm obeying God – he owes me
- God knows my prayers before I tell him – what's the point?
- I'm hurting so much about, you know what, and he's not helping me, so why should I thank him for anything?
- God didn't do that for me – it was my hard work...

It seems that the sin of ingratitude is so prevalent today. Is it because in most of the 1<sup>st</sup> world, we have too much? Our grateful one did not get so wrapped up in blessing that he forgot the 'Blesser'. With the same loud voice that he cried for mercy, the grateful one cried out in glory to God.

To be grateful is to recognize, acknowledge and accept that we are recipients of a gift. We need to open our hearts and get in touch with our thankfulness. A way of doing this is first to call upon our **intellects** so that we can *recognize* the gift. Then we need to call on our **wills** to *acknowledge* the gift as something outside of ourselves so that we can be touched and moved. With our **hearts** we *accept* the gift. As someone once said, 'There is as much grace in being a receiver as there is in being a giver.'

Let us pray for an attitude of gratitude.

'Lord, like a piece of grit in our eye or a grumbling in our stomach, we notice when small things go wrong. Yet, with a healthy body, we often forget to remember and be grateful for the thousands of things that go right each day.

Help us to take our focus away from the grit and the grumbling, and concentrate instead on the incredible gifts we are receiving when we are feeling pain and also when we are enjoying our lives, our strengths, our minds, our friends, our families and, especially, your presence in our lives.

We ask this in the name of the One who experienced earthly life with all its joys and sorrows, even Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN



