

**October 13, 2019 A Grateful Response Homily:** Many historians consider Winston Churchill, the one-time Prime Minister of England, to be one of the Twentieth Century's greatest statesmen. He served his nation with honor and distinction during one of the darkest periods of her history: the Second World War. Not only was he a recognized scholar and astute leader, he was, in addition known to be a wonderful spinner of tales. He was especially fond of telling the story of a young boy who fell off a pier into deep ocean waters. An older sailor, a veteran of the First World War, personally witnessed the boy's plunge into the sea, and reacted swiftly. Heedless of the danger to himself, he dove into the storm-tossed water, struggled with the boy and finally exhausted, brought him to safety. He had saved the youth from death by drowning. Two days later, the boy's mother came with him to the same pier, seeking the man who rescued her son. Finding him, she asked, "Are you the one who dove into the ocean to bring my boy out?" "Indeed I did", he replied. The woman's face suddenly turned crimson. She angrily demanded, "Where is his hat?"

Not exactly the words of a grateful mother!

In today's gospel, (Lk. 17:11-19) Luke the Evangelist recounts the story of the ten lepers Jesus cured. What remains most striking about this incident is not the miraculous cure but why only one of the ten returned to give thanks. Christ was clearly disappointed. "Were not ten made clean? The other nine, where are they?" (Lk. 17:17) No story in the gospels so dramatically shows the ingratitude of the human being.

The gratitude of the Samaritan leper is more than a simple act of showing Our Lord courtesy; it is also a remarkable act of faith. He represents non-Jews who are open to the message of Jesus and respond favorably to his call. On the way to his ultimate destination, Jerusalem, Jesus is in search of those who will place trust and confidence in Him. Each of the ten lepers made an appeal to Jesus "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!", and gave witness to an incipient faith. But only one of the ten, a notorious foreigner and ancestral enemy of the Jews, returned to give him thanks.

What further lessons can we derive from today's gospel?

First, life is a blessing. As we observe "Respect Life" month, let us be mindful that the author of human life is God Himself. All human life is sacred, and stands under His protection. Even the pre-born child, though perhaps unintentionally conceived, is of supreme value simply because it bears the divine imprint of God's creative hand. An inconvenient pregnancy, though regrettable, is no reason to excuse the wanton destruction of innocent human life. The same is true of the vulnerable members of our society, the disabled, the infirm, and the elderly and mentally challenged. The loss or absence of our faculties must not render a human life disposable. Recently, my father turned ninety years of age. Although he shows many signs of mental decline, I continue to love him as much as I did as a child many years ago. My love for him is unconditional! He has not lost the divine image!

Second, The Samaritan leper's faith and gratitude guarantees that he is on the right path, the path of salvation. When Jesus says to him, "Arise and go your own way", he has in mind the intention of restoring the life of a man unjustly shunned by his own people. In addition, Jesus underscores the call of following him on the path that leads to the Cross. In the 1970's an American band, Fleetwood Mac,

released a number one song about a breakup between two band members, "Go your own way". The "song" of Jesus is altogether different. It is about unity and harmony with Him.

Third, the Eucharist we celebrate is the supreme act of thanksgiving. During the Mass, the priest says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God" and the congregation responds, "It is right and just". The priest affirms the response of his people by saying that "it is always and everywhere appropriate to give the Lord thanks."

According to an ancient Jewish legend when God finished creation he asked the angels what they thought of it. One of them replied that the world is so vast and so perfect that there is nothing wanting, except a voice to offer God what is owed him: an expression of gratitude.

Jesus Christ is "the Way" (Jn.14:6). In a spirit of profound gratitude, let us follow the path chosen for us by Christ and hopefully reach our ultimate destination, the heavenly Jerusalem.

Amen!