

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

Fr. Glenn Joseph Theoret
Executive Director

www.gratitudefoundation.us
frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us

3713 County 416 20th Road
Gladstone, MI 49837

“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

Numbers 11:25-29

The LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses.
Taking some of the spirit that was on Moses,
the LORD bestowed it on the seventy elders;
and as the spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied.

Now two men, one named Eldad and the other Medad,
were not in the gathering but had been left in the camp.
They too had been on the list, but had not gone out to the tent;
yet the spirit came to rest on them also,
and they prophesied in the camp.
So, when a young man quickly told Moses,
"Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp, "
Joshua, son of Nun, who from his youth had been Moses' aide, said,
"Moses, my lord, stop them."
But Moses answered him,
"Are you jealous for my sake?
Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets!
Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all!"

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 19:8, 10, 12-13, 14

R. (9a) The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul;
the decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

Though your servant is careful of them,
very diligent in keeping them,
yet who can detect failings?

Cleanse me from my unknown faults!

R. The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.

From wanton sin especially, restrain your servant;
let it not rule over me.
Then shall I be blameless and innocent
of serious sin.

R. **The precepts of the Lord give joy to the heart.**

Reading 2

James 5:1-6

Come now, you rich, weep and wail over your impending miseries.
Your wealth has rotted away, your clothes have become moth-eaten,
your gold and silver have corroded,
and that corrosion will be a testimony against you;
it will devour your flesh like a fire.
You have stored up treasure for the last days.
Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers
who harvested your fields are crying aloud;
and the cries of the harvesters
have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.
You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure;
you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter.
You have condemned;
you have murdered the righteous one;
he offers you no resistance.

Alleluia

Cf. Jn 17:17b, 17a

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**
Your word, O Lord, is truth;
consecrate us in the truth.
R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

At that time, John said to Jesus,
"Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name,
and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us."
Jesus replied, "Do not prevent him.
There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name
who can at the same time speak ill of me.
For whoever is not against us is for us.
Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink
because you belong to Christ,
amen, I say to you, will surely not lose his reward.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,
it would be better for him if a great millstone
were put around his neck
and he were thrown into the sea.
If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.
It is better for you to enter into life maimed
than with two hands to go into Gehenna,
into the unquenchable fire.
And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.
It is better for you to enter into life crippled
than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna.
And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.
Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye
than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna,
where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."

Exegesis

Numbers 11:25-29

Numbers apparently gets its name from the census figures in chapters 1 and 26 and perhaps its mathematical data included in the book. It is a story of the Israelite's wandering years in the wilderness traveling from oppression in Egypt to the Promised Land. The first census takes place near the beginning of those years and the final census occurs near the end as they approach the Promised Land.

The setting of our pericope takes place a little over a year into the journey. Chapter 9 refers to the second Passover recently celebrated. Moses is leading the people from Mt. Sinai into the desert. Moses is burdened by the grumbling and discontent of the people. While enjoying the gift of manna daily, the people are complaining about the lack of meat for their meals. "We remember the fish we used to eat without cost in Egypt, and the cucumbers, the melons, the leaks, the onions and the garlic. But now we are famished, we have nothing before us but this manna." (Num 11:5-6).

God acknowledges the murmuring and ingratitude of the people and God hears Moses' concerns. God responds by sending quail for the people to eat. Like the manna the quail fall from the sky. "There arose a wind sent by the Lord, that drove the quail from the sea and brought them down over the camp site at a height two cubits from the ground for the distance of a day's journey all around the camp." (Num 11:31). Ironically many of the people got sick and died after eating the quail. They understand it as punishment for their ingratitude.

Moses, himself, complains to God: "I cannot carry all this people by myself, for they are too heavy for me." (Num 11:14). God's response is as follows: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Assemble for me seventy of the elders of Israel, men you know for true elders and authorities among the people, and bring them to the meeting tent. When they are in place beside you, I will come down and speak with you there. I will also take some of the spirit that is on you and bestow it on them, that they may share the burden of the people with you. You will then not have to bear it by yourself.'" (Num 11:16-17).

Our selected passage begins with the gathering of Moses and the seventy elders. The voice of God came from the cloud and the Spirit fell upon Moses and the elders and they prophesied. "They prophesied in the sense, not of foretelling the future, but of speaking in enraptured enthusiasm. Such manifestation of mystic exaltation occurred in early days of Hebrew prophesy."¹ Similarly, two elders back in the camp, Eldad and Medad, also received the Spirit and prophesied. This occurrence reveals the power of God to share His Spirit as He wills. The Spirit has no bounds or limits.

Presumptively this passage was chosen to foreshadow the power of the Spirit working outside of the purview of Jesus and His apostles in the Gospel passage for the Sunday liturgy.

1. Saint Joseph Edition of The New American Bible; Catholic Book Publishing Co.; N.Y., N.Y.; page 145; footnote 11,25.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 19:8, 10, 12-13, 14

Psalm 19 can be broken down into two distinct sections. Verses 2-7 are a creation hymn celebrating the glory of God's creation. Verses 8-18 are a wisdom hymn proclaiming the glory of the wisdom of God. Some exegetes suggest that Psalm 19 could have been divided into two separate psalms. My tendency is to not question the Holy Spirit, but to learn from that same Spirit. Perhaps the psalmist is celebrating the fact that wisdom is a part of God's creation. Both the Hebrew word for *wisdom* (*hakmot*) and the Greek word for *wisdom* (*Sophia*) are revealed in scripture as a part of God's creation, a gift from God, flowing from above. It is often contrasted with "wisdom" from below or "wisdom" of the world, sometimes referred to as folly.

Wisdom is a gift from God as God chooses to share His very Spirit with His children. Wisdom from above is articulated and codified in God's laws and precepts.

One of the gifts of that Spirit is wisdom, another is joy as the psalm proclaims.

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. It is important to note that *fear of the Lord* in the Hebrew understanding is not craven fear. It connotes a deep sense of awe and reverence before the Lord. It flows from an authentic understanding of the creator vs. creature relationship. It promotes a keen awareness that every second of our lives, every breath that we take, depend on God.

James 5:1-6

In Chapter 3 James reflects on true wisdom, i.e. wisdom from above, and contrasts it with earthly wisdom. "But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity." (Jas 3:17). James contrasts true wisdom with earthly wisdom as follows: "Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual and demonic." (Jas 3:15).

It is important to understand James' teaching on wisdom because our pericope from Chapter 5 is an example of earthly, unspiritual, and demonic "wisdom." It is the unwise who store up earthly treasures for themselves. This is especially true for those who shatter the Ten Commandments in the process. "The cries of the harvesters (cheated out of wages) have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts." (v. 5:4).

This folly is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. One of the most effective tools of the devil is to lure us into earthly comfort and complacency. Creature comforts lull us into a false sense of security. The psalmist cries out, "Lord, teach us to count our days aright, that we gain wisdom of heart." (Ps 90:12). St. Paul encourages us to be in the world but not of the world. Jesus teaches: "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroy, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be." (Mt 6:19-21).

James further reveals that the folly of the rich person included cheating his workers and now the injustice reaches the ears of the Lord. Self-serving love is exacerbated when it harms others.

Exegesis (Continued)

Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

In our Gospel scene Jesus is traveling from Caesarea Philippi through Galilee on His way to make His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem to face His Passion. There is a growing sense of urgency in His teaching. He is resolutely focused. His face is set like flint on Jerusalem. He has just told His disciples for the second time what is going to transpire in Jerusalem. As He is living and breathing absolute self-giving love, His disciples are arguing about who among them is the greatest. And now they are upset because someone outside of their little group is doing their work. Someone is driving out demons in Christ's name. In fact, they try to stop this intruder, and they cannot, so they complain to Jesus. Jesus, in turn, uses this teaching moment to explain that there are really only two sides in this battle, i.e. good vs. evil. Anyone who seeks good is driving out evil, and so no one who is for us is against us. Anyone who assists us in the mission of love, even with a small cup of water is contributing to the advancement of love.

Again, there is a great sense of urgency as Jesus tells us to get rid of any obstacles in this passing world that are separating us from His love. Nothing is more important than living in right relationship with Him now. No hand, or foot, or eye is worth eternal separation and death. Whatever it is, it is not important, get rid of it now!

No one wants to be cast into Gehenna. The word *Gehenna* referred first of all to the *Valley of Hinnom* situated west and south of Jerusalem. During the Judean monarchy it was the site where forbidden religious practices including human sacrifices by fire took place (see 2 Chr 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31). Later Gehenna would become synonymous with *hell* or *hell fire* (see 1 Enoch 27:2; Matt 5:22, 29-30; 23:33; Luke 12:5)., the place of punishment to which sinners go.²

Our pericope excludes verses 44 and 46 as most bible translations do. Verses 44 and 46 in ancient manuscripts are the same as verse 48. To not repeat this harsh verse 3 times, it is merely relegated to the final verse of this section. In this verse Jesus is quoting the final verse from the *Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, i.e., "their worm shall not die, nor their fire be extinguished." (Is 66:24). In the final paragraph of *Isaiah*, the prophet is describing an eschatology where there will be a new heaven and a new earth and there will be a great separation of those who are in and those who are outside of the walls. "As the new heavens and the new earth which I shall make shall endure before me, say the Lord, so shall your race and your name endure. From one new moon to another, from one sabbath to another, all mankind shall come to worship before Me says the Lord. They shall go out and see the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me; their worm shall not die, nor their fire be extinguished; and they shall be abhorrent to all mankind." (Is 66:22-24).

Our scripture this Sunday reveals an ultimate binary universe. We are either for Christ or we are against Christ. In the end we are either inside the gates of the New Heaven or we are outside of the walls, thus the sense of urgency. No one is sitting on the wall. There is no fence sitting in Christianity and definitely no fence sitting in the final judgement.

2. Donahue, Harrington; Sacra Pagina Series, The Gospel of Mark; L.P.; Collegeville, MN; page 287.

Reflection

In the ancient temple in Jerusalem there was a large heavy curtain that separated the inner sanctuary, the *Holy of Holies*, from the rest of the temple. It was commonly referred to as the temple veil. It was of course made and installed by human hands. The Ark of the Covenant which contained the tablets of the law given by God to Moses resided in the inner sanctuary, and the staff of Moses was there as well. It was thought to be the most sacred place on earth. People were forbidden to enter the *Holy of Holies*.

The temple veil separated God from the people. The veil is deeply symbolic of the alienation from God that people felt then and that we still experience today. They were keenly aware of the holiness of God and of their own sinfulness. They were striving for atonement, for at-one-ment with God, but always seemed to fall short. They were always searching for the most perfect unblemished lamb to offer to God in atonement for their sins, but always seemed to feel that their sins were more than any animal sacrifice could atone.

Some 500 years before Jesus was born the Prophet Isaiah prophesied: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples. On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever." (Is 25:7). The holy mountain is the hill of Calvary. At the moment that Jesus died on the cross the temple veil was rent in two from top to bottom. The perfect unblemished Lamb of God, He who was without sin, He who was both God and man came crashing through the barriers of sin and death. He destroyed once and for all the alienation caused by sin. That which was placed by human hands is destroyed by God forever.

Now, if we feel alienation from God, it is because we have separated ourselves from God. If there are barriers between us and God, they are obstacles that we have placed in our lives. Jesus is telling us plainly to get rid of all things that might separate us from God. If our hand is the problem, cut it off. If our foot is the problem, cut it off. It makes no difference what it is. All that matters is that we get rid of it.

Perhaps the biggest problem that we face today is the culture in which we live. We are immersed in a society that is drifting from God. We are caught up in the current. As difficult as it may be we must swim against the current or else we will find ourselves going over the damn with everyone else! The Church is the ark that will allow us to sail against the current. It is time for all of us to start rowing. Together we can row faster than the current, but only if we pull together, and perhaps invoke a little of the wind of the Holy Spirit! And so, we pray, Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Jesus and Mother Mary,



Personal Witness

I am what is referred to as a second career vocation. I entered the seminary at the age of 42 and was ordained at 47. Before entering the seminary, I worked as a Certified Public Accountant for 19 years. From the time that I knew that God was calling me to be a priest, it took me 7 years to finally make the move to seminary. Those were some of the most difficult years of my life as I painfully went through the process of cutting things out of my life and letting go. I had numerous business ventures that I had to sell and let go of. I was active in many community organizations that I had to move on from. The final and most difficult task of all involved the selling of my home that I had completely remodeled and refurbished and had settled into comfortably.

I remember the day 30 years ago when I finally moved into my room at Mundelein Seminary. It was a typical dorm style room about 14' square. It came furnished with a twin bed, a desk and chair, a large crucifix on the wall and one 60-watt lightbulb in the center of the ceiling. I remember that first night as if it were yesterday. I sat at my desk and stared up at the crucifix for the longest time. I have never felt so free and so at peace as I did at that moment. For the first time in my life, I knew that my will and God's will for me were one.

As I settled into seminary life I did a bit of refurbishing of my new digs. I brought in some furniture as space and seminary rules would allow. I built some bookshelves and a loft for sleeping, separated a living space from a workspace, etc. My room and my life started to clutter up a bit once again.

A couple months into that fall term the seminary had a parents night scheduled. So here I am a 42-year-old man cleaning my room knowing that my mother was coming to inspect. I did my dusting and mopping and then decided that the 60-watt lightbulb was leaving the room much too dark. I went out and purchased a 250-watt LED bulb that lit up the room. It was bright enough such that a group of classmates walked in the next day wearing sunglasses. One of them asked, "you are going to clean your room aren't you?" As I looked around, I could see dust and dirt that I had not been able to see with the prior lighting. More cleaning followed.

That experience became a metaphor for my spiritual life. As I continued to nurture my personal relationship with the Lord, as I drew closer to the light of Christ, I could see sin and obstacles in my life that I could not see before. Most often there were things that had been there for a long time, but I did not see them. Conversion for me became, and remains today, an almost daily process of reflection and response. Sometimes that response includes a little self-surgery. With spiritual enlightenment I find myself inspired and empowered to take the necessary steps to remove the obstacles to a deeper life in Christ. Often the inspiration is to positive action that supersedes the old ways or areas of inaction. Sometimes the light reveals the darkness of evil lurking and seeking to destroy from within. This journey of faith requires me to constantly connect and reconnect with the light of Christ. It has been a journey deeper and deeper into the light. This inward journey is sometimes difficult, sometimes painful, sometimes fearful, but always rewarding and joyful in the end. For this I am, and will always be, eternally grateful.

F. Glenn