

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 Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time —Year C

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

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Reading I

1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

In those days, Saul went down to the desert of Ziph
with three thousand picked men of Israel,
to search for David in the desert of Ziph.
So David and Abishai went among Saul's soldiers by night
and found Saul lying asleep within the barricade,
with his spear thrust into the ground at his head
and Abner and his men sleeping around him.

Abishai whispered to David:
"God has delivered your enemy into your grasp this day.
Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear;
I will not need a second thrust!"
But David said to Abishai, "Do not harm him,
for who can lay hands on the LORD's anointed and remain unpunished?"
So David took the spear and the water jug from their place at Saul's head,
and they got away without anyone's seeing or knowing or awakening.
All remained asleep,
because the LORD had put them into a deep slumber.

Going across to an opposite slope,
David stood on a remote hilltop
at a great distance from Abner, son of Ner, and the troops.
He said: "Here is the king's spear.
Let an attendant come over to get it.
The LORD will reward each man for his justice and faithfulness.
Today, though the LORD delivered you into my grasp,
I would not harm the LORD's anointed."

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13

R (8a) **The Lord is kind and merciful.**
Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.
R **The Lord is kind and merciful.**

He pardons all your iniquities,
 heals all your ills.
He redeems your life from destruction,
 crowns you with kindness and compassion.
R The Lord is kind and merciful.

Merciful and gracious is the LORD,
 slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
Not according to our sins does he deal with us,
 nor does he requite us according to our crimes.
R The Lord is kind and merciful.

As far as the east is from the west,
 so far has he put our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
 so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.
R The Lord is kind and merciful.

Reading II

1 Corinthians 15:45-49

Brothers and sisters:
It is written, *The first man, Adam, became a living being,*
the last Adam a life-giving spirit.
But the spiritual was not first;
rather the natural and then the spiritual.
The first man was from the earth, earthly;
the second man, from heaven.
As was the earthly one, so also are the earthly,
and as is the heavenly one, so also are the heavenly.
Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one,
we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.

Alleluia

John 13:34

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
I give you a new commandment, says the Lord:
love one another as I have loved you.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 6:27-38

Jesus said to his disciples:

“To you who hear I say,
love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.
To the person who strikes you on one cheek,
offer the other one as well,
and from the person who takes your cloak,
do not withhold even your tunic.
Give to everyone who asks of you,
and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back.
Do to others as you would have them do to you.
For if you love those who love you,
what credit is that to you?
Even sinners love those who love them.
And if you do good to those who do good to you,
what credit is that to you?
Even sinners do the same.
If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment,
what credit is that to you?
Even sinners lend to sinners,
and get back the same amount.
But rather, love your enemies and do good to them,
and lend expecting nothing back;
then your reward will be great
and you will be children of the Most High,
for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.
Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“Stop judging and you will not be judged.
Stop condemning and you will not be condemned.
Forgive and you will be forgiven.
Give, and gifts will be given to you;
a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing,
will be poured into your lap.
For the measure with which you measure
will in return be measured out to you.”

Exegesis

Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel reveal the beginning of the Prophetic and the Monarchy traditions of the Israelite People. To give us a timeframe perspective, the years of the reign of King David are 1090-970 B.C.

After David defeated Goliath, Saul put the young David in charge of all his armies. Saul quickly became jealous of David's success, "The women played and sang: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.' Saul was very angry and resentful of the song, for he thought: 'They give David ten thousands, but only thousands to me. All that remains for him is the kingship.' (And from that day on Saul was jealous of David. The next day an evil spirit from God came over Saul, and he raged in his house. David was in attendance, playing the harp as at other times, while Saul was holding his spear. Saul poised the spear, thinking to nail David to the wall, but twice David escaped him.)" (1 Sam 18: 7-11).

The heading of Chapter 26 is titled *Saul's Life Again Spared*. This is the second story in *1 Samuel* of David sparing the life of Saul. The first appears in Chapter 24. Some exegetes suggest that our pericope may be a retelling of the story told in Chapter 24.¹ Whether it is a retelling of the event or if it is the second time that David spares Saul's life, it is a wonderful story of mercy and forgiveness.

Saul is searching for David with 3,000 troops. David has a smaller band of 600 soldiers with him. As in his battle with the Philistine Giant, Goliath, the power of God is with David. With cunning wisdom David is able to infiltrate Saul's camp. David is standing at the head of the sleeping Saul, holding the very spear that Saul tried to kill him with twice. Now he has the opportunity to kill his enemy with his own spear and decides to spare his life. As in many of the parables that Jesus tells the thoughts of the main character are revealed to us. In this case we are able to hear David's inner thoughts. He decides to spare Saul even though an evil spirit now seems to be guiding him, because he was once anointed by God.

Not knowing David's inner thoughts and his intentions, Saul is moved by the extreme mercy and graciousness of David. Saul is changed by the grace of David. Saul respond to David, "I have done wrong. Come back, my son David, I will not harm you again, because you have held my life precious today. Indeed, I have been a fool and have made a serious mistake." (1 Sam 26: 21). Then in the final recorded words between the two Saul blesses David: "Then Saul said to David: 'Blessed are you, my son David! You shall certainly succeed in whatever you undertake.'" David went his way and Saul returned to his home." (1 Sam 26: 25).

1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; page 152.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 103: 1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13

Psalm 103 consists of 22 verses and is titled *Praise of Divine Goodness – of David*. The psalm begins and ends with the same verse, *Bless the Lord, my soul*.

The Hebrew word translated as *soul* is *nepes*. This word first appears in Sacred Scripture in the creation story of Genesis. “The Lord God formed man (*adam*) out of the clay of the ground (*adama*) and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being (*nepes*). (Gen 2:7).

And all my being, bless His Holy Name. The Hebrew word that is translated as *being* is again *nepes*. *Nepes* in its original form was used to describe the throat or neck of a person. From the creation story forward in Sacred Scripture *nepes* is used to describe human life. God is recognized as the source of this life. The breath of God in the creation story entered the nostrils and passed through the throat or the neck of the person, and man became a living being. God revealed Himself to Moses as Being itself, the one whose nature it is to be. The psalmist therefore first give thanks to God for life itself.

He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills. Secondly, the psalmist is giving thanks to God for the forgiveness of sins and the healing that flows from that mercy. The ancient world often associated sin with physical illness. For example, “Some fell sick from their wicked ways, afflicted because of their sins.” (Ps 107:17). (See also the Book of Job). They also associated God’s forgiveness with physical healing. For example, “In their distress they cried to the Lord, who saved them in their peril, sent forth the word to heal them, snatched them from the grave.” (Ps 107: 19-20). The first words of Jesus to the paralytic were, “Child your sins are forgiven.” (Mk 2: 5). Then Jesus said to the paralytic, “I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.” (Mk 2: 11). Jesus forgave the man his sins and then healing followed.

Merciful and gracious is the Lord. The theme of God’s great mercy and graciousness flows throughout Sacred Scripture from the earliest of times, e.g., “The Lord is slow to anger and rich in kindness, forgiving wickedness and crime.” (Num 14: 18). Mercy and graciousness are attributes of God’s covenantal love (*hesed*) which is glorified in verse 11. (Not included in our pericope).

So, the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. The Hebrew word that is translated as *fear* is *ye re* (pronounced *ya ray*). Whereas *ye re* can mean craven fear as the English connotation typically holds; in Sacred Scripture relative to God, it most often means a sense of awe or reverence. The faithful often have a difficult time understanding why we should fear our God of *hesed*, *agape*, love. It is therefore important to point out the sense of awe and reverence that *ye re* evokes. It is about an authentic relationship between creature and creator. We approach our creator God with a sense of awe and reverence because of His mercy and graciousness and compassion.

Exegesis (Continued)

1 Corinthians 15:45-49

In our passage from *1 Corinthians* St. Paul is addressing some arrant thinking among the fledgling Church at Corinth. The issue is stated clearly in the first verse twelve: “But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection from the dead?” (1 Cor 15:12). It is not surprising that the Church at Corinth would be influenced by Hellenistic philosophy. The Greek philosophers envisioned a separation of the soul from the body at death, i.e., the soul being set free from the fallen and darkened and transient corporeal realm. Among the Jews a small group of Sadducees also believed that there was no resurrection of the body.

St. Paul begins his argument for the resurrection of the body by focusing on the resurrection of Jesus. The Risen Lord appeared to Paul, the apostles, and many others for a reason, to show us life beyond the grave. Jesus died on the Cross for our sins, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. There are many witnesses to these historical events. Jesus spent three days in the tomb to validate that His death was real. He rose from the dead and appeared in His glorified body, a body that was real and recognizable, with visible wounds from the Cross, yet He was able to appear in the Upper Room although the doors were locked. His appearances affirm the reality of the resurrection of the body.

Belief in bodily resurrection had already been revealed in the OT. “But the dead shall rise, their corpses shall rise; awake and sing, you who lie in the dust.” (Is 26:19). “Thus says the Lord God to these bones: See! I will bring My Spirit into you that you may come to life.” (Ez 37: 5). Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; Some shall live forever; others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.” (Dan 12:2). “You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever.” (2 Mac 7:9). Note that the earliest of these OT passages, i.e. from Isaiah, dates back to 740 B.C. The resurrection of the body to eternal life, while made visible in the Risen Lord, was not new to the Jewish faith.

When we think of the various resurrection appearances of Jesus we tend to focus on those appearances to the apostles and others as revealed in the four Gospels. These appearances all occur between the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus. After the Ascension, the Risen Lord also appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. St. Paul acknowledges his calling from the Lord, and like Peter, he too is aware of his own unworthiness. Perhaps this is particularly difficult for Paul in that he was violently attacking the early Church. Jesus makes no distinction between Himself and His Church when he exclaims, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” (Acts 9:4). Paul not only uses his experience of the Risen Lord in his arguments supporting the resurrection of the body, but he bases his authority on his personal calling from the Risen Lord, Himself.

Our pericope today begins with a citation from the Creation Story of Genesis. The full verse of that citation is as follows: “The Lord God formed man (*adam*) out of the clay of the ground (*adama*) and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being (*nepes*).” (Gen 2:7). Adam is the recipient of the life breath of God and so he became a living being.

St. Paul describes Jesus as the life-giving Spirit. Whereas Adam is the receiver of that Spirit, Jesus is the giver of that Spirit. Paul assures us that because Jesus became what Adam was and we are now, we can become what Christ is now, i.e., Resurrected.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 6:27-38

In our Gospel scene, Jesus went up the mountain and spent the night in prayer. As morning arrived, He choose His twelve apostles. “And He came down with them and stood on a stretch of level ground. A crowd of His disciples and a large number of people from all of Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases... (Lk 6:17:18). Tyre and Sidon is Gentile territory. This inclusivity is an ongoing theme of Luke. (See also 2:31-32; 3:6; 4:24-27).

Jesus uses the word “blessed” in the immediately preceding passage that we call the Beatitudes. *Blessed* is translated from the Greek word, *markarios*. Speaking in Aramaic, Jesus would have had to inject this Greek word as there is no Aramaic equivalent. The Hebrew word *asre* is the closest equivalent, but it falls short of the true meaning of *makarios*. *Makarios*, at its origin, speaks of a state of being that has God as its source. Aristotle taught that we could experience this higher state of being by dying to ourselves in self-giving love. As we die to ourselves, we connect with the ground of our being, which is divine life, love itself. As we connect with this immutable force, we reach an anchor point that is unshakable and eternal. It is transformative grace that elevates our lives to a new state of being. It is the fullness of life that Jesus talks about. It is a selfless state of being that is described by Jesus in the Beatitudes.

Makarios appears throughout the Greek NT to describe a state of being that is divine in its origin. It is summed up best in the *Book of Revelation*: “I heard a voice from Heaven say, ‘Write this; Blessed (*Makarios*) are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ said the Spirit, ‘let them find rest from their labors, for their works accompany them.’”

The imagery of Jesus coming down from the mountain after a night of prayer evokes the scene of Moses who came down from the mountain and set the Law before the Israelites. (See Exod 19:20-23, 33; Deut 4:44, 26:19). Now it is Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the Law, who wishes to write a higher law on our hearts. It is the law of Love, absolute radical self-giving love.

This elevated state of being is calling us to live our lives in Christ and Christ in us. In words of St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (Gal 2:20). It is a calling that surpasses the Golden Rule. We are not called to just love others as we love ourselves. We are not called just to treat others as we would want to be treated. Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you.” He also said, “Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.” We are called to love and act as God would love and act. That means loving when it is hard to love, to love unconditionally and without limit. It means to be merciful as God is merciful, again without limit or conditions.

When we can love our enemies, when we are able to love effortlessly, it is God who is loving in and through us.

Reflection

In our first reading this weekend Saul is pursuing David with an army with the intent of killing him. David sneaks into the sleeping camp of Saul and has the opportunity to kill his enemy in his sleep. The inner thoughts of David are revealed to us. He fears the reprisal of God if he were to kill Saul who was anointed by God as he himself was. David makes the decision to spare him out of fear for his own life. He also wants Saul to know that he could have killed him but showed him mercy, so he takes his spear and water jug that was near his head and would later show it to him from a distance. Not knowing the inner thoughts of David, Saul is overwhelmed by the mercy that was shown to him. Saul abandons his quest for David's head. In fact, Saul is changed forever. He in turn blesses David and desires nothing but the best for him. The point of the story is that love, and mercy can change lives and the course of history.

In our Gospel this weekend Jesus takes love and mercy to another level. In our first reading, David did the natural human thing as he weighed the consequences of his actions. Jesus is asking us to rise to the super-natural level, to love our neighbor as He loves us. Whenever those words of Jesus echo in my mind, "love one another as I have loved you," my focus turns toward the Crucifix, and I wonder how it is humanly possible. How can we love to the extent that He is asking us to love? How can we love our enemies? How do we love those who are trying to kill us? How do we love people like Adolph Hitler who personified evil and reigned unthinkable terror and death on the world?

I think the answer is that we can't. But God can. God is love. Jesus entered into our sinful human condition to raise us up to a new level of being. To love as He loves us is to love unconditionally and indiscriminately. When we realize that the words of St. Paul are true, that even though we are sinners, Christ still died for us, we experience God's unconditional love and mercy. From the starting point of that realization, we are able to begin to love as we have been loved. We are able to do that by allowing ourselves to be loved and then allowing God to love others in and through us. When we experience loving beyond our human natural ability then we experience divine supernatural love flowing through us. Collectively, if we could discover the power of divine love, we could change the world!

It is our calling. We are, as the body of Christ, called and chosen to be Spirit filled, Spirit led, and Spirit giving people. Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of us Your faithful, and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".

Personal Witness

During my seminary years I volunteered one or two nights per week at a local community meal program. The meal program fed on average of approximately four hundred patrons six nights per week. This amazing mission was initiated by a former religious sister that we affectionately called Sister Catherine. She was a large robust woman with a long southern drawl and a smile as big as Texas. She was a ball of energy and had a kind word for everyone. She knew all of us volunteers and most of the regular patrons on a first name basis and had kind nicknames for many of the clientele. She was filled with the Holy Spirit such that it could not be contained but poured out upon all those around her.

One of the regular patrons was a cantankerous elderly woman named Katie. Katie was a very difficult person. No one seemed to be able to get close to her or communicate with her. She always sat away by herself. All the other patrons seemed to go out of their way to avoid her. She was wearing the same ragged clothes every time that I saw her. She carried with her an odor due to lack of bathing opportunities. She was homeless and walked from shelter to shelter. Sr. Catherine worked hard to befriend her with little success. She went out of her way to be extra friendly towards her.

Late one evening as we were closing, Sr. Catherine asked if anyone had seen her coat. She described it as a new second hand imitation fur coat that she had purchased at the St. Vincent de Paul store. The matching hat was hanging on a hook in the kitchen where that missing coat once was. Sr. Catherine sent someone out to warm up her car and we loaned her a sweatshirt to at least get her home without hypothermia, as it was a frigid January evening.

The following week Katie boldly showed up wearing Sr. Catherine's coat. After Katie had eaten and was walking out, Sr. Catherine walked over to her and the two of them went back into the kitchen. Moments later Katie came walking out with a big toothless smile wearing the coat and now the matching hat. When we asked Sr. about it, she said that she told Katie that she could have the coat, and she gave her the matching hat as well. Then she said, "I gave her a big hug and told her how much I love her and how much God loves her." One of my seminary friends replied, "You hugged Katie? How do you hug a porcupine?" Sr. Catherine replied, "God created porcupines too."

In the days and weeks that followed a transformation came over Katie that was remarkable. At first, I noticed that she began to socialize with the other patrons. She began to improve her hygiene, fix her hair, and she started to dress with clean(er) clothes. She was friendly to us volunteers such that we were able to get to know her a little. Then she began to help us with the cleanup tasks later in the evening. Working together we were able to get to know her quite well. She had had a hard life, yet she had a wonderful sense of humor. She was a real character. She began to attend morning Mass at the parish with Sr. Catherine, the two became good friends, and Katie came into the Church that following Easter.

It is amazing what a random act of kindness, a hug, a twelve-dollar imitation fur coat and matching hat can do to a person. To think that a prickly porcupine can become a cuddly kitten in the matter of days. God is good, but it was Sr. Catherine who delivered that goodness and love and mercy. Now it is up to each of us to pass it on! Have you hugged a porcupine lately?

