

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)

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—C

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

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—C

Reading 1

Genesis 18:1-10a

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the terebinth of Mamre,
as he sat in the entrance of his tent,
while the day was growing hot.
Looking up, Abraham saw three men standing nearby.
When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them;
and bowing to the ground, he said:
"Sir, if I may ask you this favor,
please do not go on past your servant.
Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet,
and then rest yourselves under the tree.
Now that you have come this close to your servant,
let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves;
and afterward you may go on your way."
The men replied, "Very well, do as you have said."

Abraham hastened into the tent and told Sarah,
"Quick, three measures of fine flour! Knead it and make rolls."
He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice steer,
and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it.
Then Abraham got some curds and milk,
as well as the steer that had been prepared,
and set these before the three men;
and he waited on them under the tree while they ate.

They asked Abraham, "Where is your wife Sarah?"
He replied, "There in the tent."
One of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year,
and Sarah will then have a son."

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 15:2-3, 3-4, 5

R.(1a) He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

One who walks blamelessly and does justice;
who thinks the truth in his heart
and slanders not with his tongue.

R. He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Who harms not his fellow man,
nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor;
by whom the reprobate is despised,
while he honors those who fear the LORD.

R. He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Who lends not his money at usury
and accepts no bribe against the innocent.
One who does these things
shall never be disturbed.
R. He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord.

Reading 2

Colossians 1:24-28

Brothers and sisters:
Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake,
and in my flesh I am filling up
what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ
on behalf of his body, which is the church,
of which I am a minister
in accordance with God's stewardship given to me
to bring to completion for you the word of God,
the mystery hidden from ages and from generations past.
But now it has been manifested to his holy ones,
to whom God chose to make known the riches of the glory
of this mystery among the Gentiles;
it is Christ in you, the hope for glory.
It is he whom we proclaim,
admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom,
that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

Alleluia

Cf. Luke 8:15

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Blessed are they who have kept the word with a generous heart
and yield a harvest through perseverance.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 10:38-42

Jesus entered a village
where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him.
She had a sister named Mary
who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak.
Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said,
"Lord, do you not care
that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving?
Tell her to help me."
The Lord said to her in reply,
"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things.
There is need of only one thing.
Mary has chosen the better part
and it will not be taken from her."

Exegesis

Genesis 18:1-10a

Our pericope today is titled *Abraham's Visitors*. Chapter Seventeen sets the stage for the events that take place in our selected passage from Chapter Eighteen. God is revealing Himself to Abram and establishing His covenant with him and his descendants. "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord (*Yahweh*) appeared to him and said, 'I am God the Almighty (*El Shaddai*). Walk in my presence and be blameless. Between you and me I will establish my covenant, and I will multiply you exceedingly.'" (Gen 17: 1). "When Abram prostrated himself, God (*Elohim*) continued to speak to him: 'My covenant with you is this: you are to become a father to a host of nations.'" (Gen 17: 3-4).

In Chapter Seventeen the word *covenant* appears 13 times. The Hebrew word for *covenant* is *berit* which describes a mutual pledge of fidelity between two parties. This mutual pledge of faithfulness is to be between God and Abram and his posterity. Note that this is God's initiative, but it requires a response from Abram and his descendants. Abram's initial response is that of disbelief: "Abraham prostrated himself and laughed as he said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Or can Sarah give birth at ninety?'" (Gen 17: 17). "God (*Elohim*) replied: 'Nevertheless, your wife Sarah is to bear a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting pact, to be his God and the God of his descendants after him.'" (Gen 17: 19).

The name *Isaac* is derived from the Hebrew word *yishaq* which means *laughed*.

It is interesting that three distinct names for God are intertwined in Chapter Seventeen, i.e. *Yahweh*, *El Shaddai*, and *Elohim*. When God appears, the name *Yahweh* is used. When God speaks the name *Elohim* is used. God Himself reveals that He is *El Shaddai*, i.e., *God the Almighty One*. The NJBC points out that etymologically *El Shaddai* means *God, the One of the Mountain*.¹

The Lord (*Yahweh*) appeared to Abraham, and when he looked up, he saw three men. My first reaction is that the three men represent God in three persons, the Trinity. Later in the story two of the men are revealed as two angels with *Yahweh*. "While the two men walked on further toward Sodom, the Lord (*Yahweh*) remained standing before Abraham." (Gen 18: 22). "The two angels reached Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom." (Gen 19: 1).

It is important to again point out *Yahweh's* initiative in this story. *Yahweh*, who reveals Himself as *El Shaddai*, comes down the mountain to visit the home of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham recognizes *Yahweh* in the three persons standing before him. He opens his home in hospitality. As he sits before the Lord, Sarah scurries to prepare a meal for them. (Mary and Martha?)

Yahweh reveals to Abraham and Sarah the promise of a son. Like Abraham in the first revelation of this impending miracle Sarah laughs (*yishaq*) at the news. "So, Sarah laughed (*yishaq*) to herself..." (Gen 19: 12). "But the Lord (*Yahweh*) said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I bear a son, old as I am?' Is anything to marvelous (impossible) for the Lord (*Yahweh*) to do? At the appointed time, about this time next year, I will return to you, and Sarah will have a son.'" (Gen 18: 13-14).

When we welcome God into our home, into our hearts, new life comes forth.

1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; page 22.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 15:2-3, 3-4, 5

Psalm 15 is entitled *The Righteous Israelite, A Psalm of David*. It consists of five verses, all of which are included today. The first verse serves as the refrain.

He who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord. A more literal translation of verse one is as follows: “Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy mountain?” The tent and the holy mountain are symbolic of the dwelling place of God. “The Ark of the Lord was brought in and set in its place within the tent David had pitched for it.” (2 Sam 6: 17). “Loving the name of the Lord and becoming His servants; all who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to my covenant, them I will bring to My holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer.” (Is 56: 6-7). Heaven is also depicted in Sacred Scripture as a tent and a holy mountain. “After this I had another vision. The temple that is the heavenly tent of testimony opened and the seven angels with the seven plaques came out of the temple.” (Rev 15: 5). “You have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.” (Heb 12: 22-24).

Who thinks the truth in his heart. The Hebrew word that is translated here as *thinks* is *dabar*. *Dabar* means to speak, talk, utter with the mouth. *In his heart*, carries a connotation of an internal thought or verbalization, and is therefore translated here as *thinks*. The Hebrew word for *truth* is *emet*. This word is translated by the LXX into Greek as *alethia*. The English translation *truth* falls short of capturing the depth of this word. It describes the ultimate immutable reality of being that has God as its source. It describes what is really real in a corporeal world in a constant state of flux. The ultimate Truth is that God is love and that reality is made manifest is Jesus who is the Truth.

Who harms not his fellow man, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor; by whom the reprobate is despised, while he honors those who fear the LORD. Now the psalmist turns our attention to just conduct toward our neighbor, our fellow man. We are called to honor our neighbor who fears God. The Hebrew word for *fear* in this verse is *yirah* which carries a connotation of reverence and awe.

Who lends not his money at usury and accepts no bribe against the innocent. Charging interest on a loan was forbidden under the Law. “If you lend money to one of your neighbors among my people, you shall not act as an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him.” (Ex 22: 24). “Do not extract interest from your countryman either in money or in kind but out of fear of the Lord let him live with you. You are to lend him neither money at interest nor food at a profit.” (Lev 25: 36-37). (See also Deut 23:19-20 and Neh 5:7).

Verses 2-5 define who the one is who does justice. It is whoever acts in a righteous way before God, i.e., one who walks without fault, who does what is just, who speaks the truth, who does not slander or wrong a neighbor. The Prophet Isaiah describes the just person as follows: “He who practices virtue and speaks honestly, who spurns what is gained by oppression, brushing his hands free of contact with a bribe, stopping his ears lest he hear of bloodshed, closing his eyes lest he look on evil. He shall dwell on the heights, his stronghold shall be rocky fastness, his food and drink in steady supply.” (Is 33: 15-16).

The bottom line is that we cannot love God without loving our neighbor who is also a child of God.

Exegesis (Continued)

Colossians 1:24-28

Modern scholarship debates whether *Colossians* was written by Paul or one of his disciples. That discussion is beyond the scope of this exegesis, and for the sake of this writing I will use Paul as the author.

Colossae is a town in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor. It is located a few miles east of Ephesus. It was known for its wool and textile industry. In fact, its name comes from a dark red dye used for wool, *colossinus*. Colossae was a gentile territory made up of Persians and Greeks with a sizable Jewish population of approximately 10,000.

There is no record of Paul ever visiting Colossae. The community there was founded by Epaphras, a native of Colossae. Philemon and the slave Onesimus also were natives of Colossae.

Our pericope today begins a section in *Colossians* that is titled *Paul's Sufferings and Ministry*.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. Joy in suffering is a common theme in the New Testament. Jesus, Himself, as He was about to face His Passion, said: "I have told you this so that My joy might be in you and your joy might be complete." (Jn 15: 11). In the Beatitudes Jesus also said: "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven." (Mt 5: 11). The apostles quickly discovered what Jesus was talking about as they began their public ministry. "After recalling the apostles, they had them flogged, ordering them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them. So, they left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name." (Acts 5: 40-41). St. Peter offers advice to the early Church: "Beloved, do not be surprised that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as if something strange were happening to you. But rejoice to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that when His glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly." (2 Pt 4: 12-13).

Paul often spoke of his sufferings for the Lord. "Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep..." (2 Cor 11: 24-25).

Paul spoke often of sharing in the sufferings of Christ, of Christ's suffering overflowing in us. "For as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow. If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; if we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement, which enables you to endure the same sufferings that we suffer." (2 Cor 1: 5-6).

"These words could be misunderstood to mean that the suffering of Christ was not sufficient for redemption and that the suffering of the saints must be added to complete it. This, however, would be heretical. Christ and the Church are one Mystical Person, and while the merits of Christ, the head, are infinite, the saints acquire merit in limited degree. What is 'lacking', then, pertains to the afflictions of the entire Church, to which Paul adds his own amount."²

2. St. Thomas Aquinas; Commentary on Colossians 1, 6.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 10:38-42

This weekend's Gospel is the well-known Martha-Mary story. The story comes at a point in the Gospel where St. Luke transitions from parables of action to his famous discourse on prayer. The Gospel moves from lessons on discipleship and being a good neighbor to teachings on prayer. Martha and Mary serve as the hinge in this transition. They are sisters and the point is that both action and prayer are necessary.

This story of Martha and Mary is unique to Luke's Gospel. Martha and Mary welcome Jesus into their home, each in her own way, one with presence and one with service.

Martha and Mary are revealed as sisters of Lazarus in John's Gospel.

She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak.

Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus. This is the posture of a disciple. Luke mentions this earlier in his Gospel. "People came out to see what was happening and, when they approached Jesus, they discovered the man from whom the demons had been driven out sitting at His feet." (Lk 8: 35). St. Paul spoke of sitting at the feet of his Jewish teacher. "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city (Jerusalem). At the feet of Gamaliel, I was educated strictly in our ancestral law and was zealous for God, just as all of you are today." (Acts 22: 3).

The Greek word that is translated as *speak* in this verse is *logos*. *Logos* is typically translated as *word*. Jesus is the Eternal Logos, the personification of the Word of God. Mary was sitting at the feet of the Word Made Flesh. She was listening. The Word was fulfilled in her hearing.

Martha, burdened with much serving. The Greek word that is translated as *burdened* here is *perispao*. The word implies that she was not only burdened but preoccupied and distracted as well. The burden of serving was keeping her from spending precious time at the feet of Jesus.

"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me." It was a cultural norm not to invite a guest to intervene in a domestic dispute. Martha broke that rule. Bishop Robert Barron pointed out in a recent reflection on this Gospel story that we know that Martha has things all wrong in that she is telling God what to do.

Mary has chosen the better part. The Greek word that translated as *better* in this passage is *agathos*. *Agathos* is sometimes translated as *good*. Jesus uses this word in His teaching on prayer: "How much more will your heavenly Father give you good (*agathos*) things to those who ask." (Mt 7: 11).

St. Gregory the Great reflected on the allegorical level of this story. "The two women signify two dimensions of the spiritual life. Martha signifies the active life as she busily labors to honor Christ through her work. Mary exemplifies the contemplative life as she sits attentively to listen and learn from Christ. While both activities are essential to Christian living, the latter is greater than the former. For in heaven the active life terminates, while the contemplative life reaches perfection."³

3. St. Gregory the Great; Moralia 2, 6.

Reflection

This weekend's Gospel is the well-known Martha-Mary story. The story comes at a point in the Gospel where St. Luke transitions from parables of action to his famous discourse on prayer. The Gospel moves from lessons on discipleship and being a good neighbor to teachings on prayer. Martha and Mary serve as the hinge in this transition. They are sisters and the point is that both action and prayer are necessary.

While Martha is busying about, anxious and worried, Mary sits at the feet of Jesus. Prayer can be described in many ways and takes various forms, but ultimately it is sitting at the feet of Jesus. Mary was sitting attentively at the feet of Jesus, and she was listening to Him. Often the most difficult dimension of prayer for people is the listening part. It requires that we slow ourselves down from the busyness of life to listen deep within our hearts. There we find God in the stillness and silence.

I have often shared times in my life from childhood when I experienced God in a powerful way. Each time the experiences came I felt that I was alone with Jesus. After making my First Communion kneeling in a crowded church, I suddenly found myself alone with Jesus. On a bitter cold January night on the road between the barn and the house at my grandparent's farm I found myself alone with Jesus. I was able to feel in that encounter a love that is beyond words. It was an experience of the heart and of the soul.

Most of my life as a type "A" person I have felt like Martha, busy, anxious and worried about many things. When I look back at my life before seminary I recall how far I had strayed from God just by being overly preoccupied with day-to-day life. I was living a very full and active life, yet there was a void that I did not recognize and that I could not seem to fill. It was God that I did not have room for, and I did not realize it at the time. Ultimately the childhood experiences with Jesus brought me back to the feet of Jesus.

The busyness of seminary life and pastoral internships once again brought busyness and preoccupation with getting things done. This once again caused me to drift. Time and time again I had to consciously make a choice to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen with my heart. I had to constantly move from talking about Jesus to talking to and listening to Jesus.

In the years that followed serving as a busy pastor, I found myself busy, anxious and worried about many things and daily I was led to the feet of Jesus to listen and to pray. It seems to be a constant unending cycle of action and prayer. Both are necessary in my life, and I think that that is the point of our Gospel story. I am only now starting to integrate the two into one: prayerful, holy, action, i.e. to cooperate with God's will and Grace, to allow God to work in and through me. Perhaps that is where God wants us all to be as His Mystical Body here on earth. So, 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

I have been truly blessed to be surrounded by people of great faith throughout my life, especially in my immediate and extended family. Perhaps the persons that had the greatest influence on my faith growing up were my paternal grandparents who were particularly devout Catholics. After their passing, my Aunt Marie, their oldest daughter, took over as a spiritual mentor and prayer warrior for me into my seminary years and my priesthood. She passed away several years ago at the age of 93. She was a retired high school teacher who remained single throughout her life and cared for her aging parents in their final years. She attended daily Mass, led the morning rosary and was very active in her local parish, the parish that we all grew up in. She was a most saintly person with an amazing prayer life. She was both Mary and Martha in the Gospel for today.

One day after dinner she wanted to talk to me about struggling with her prayers. As a teacher Aunt Marie was a strong type “A” person, some would say a little bossy at times. As she described her prayer experience some of that personality was recognizable. Over the years she had accumulated quite a menagerie of prayers that she prayed (read) daily. She had an old Catholic prayer book that was tattered with wear. The pages were stuffed full of additional prayers and devotions that she had added over the years. Her list of intentions had also continued to grow as years passed. I was happy to discover that I was on her list near the top.

She began to confide in me her concerns and her recent struggles with her prayers. She told me that she found herself more and more distracted as she tried to pray. She said that thoughts kept coming into her mind as she was reciting her prayers. Her prayers were beautiful prayers, words that were formulated by some of the most holy men and women, saints of our Catholic Tradition. They were full of contrition and petition, honor and glory and praise. For almost two hours every day she bombarded the heavens with her words and the words of the saints.

I listened attentively as she described her prayer experience for over an hour. Then she looked at me for my response. I responded, “Could it be that God is trying to talk to you?” My next question was, “How would you feel if you were in a relationship where only one person did all of the talking?” I asked her to describe some of the “distractions” that she had recently experienced during prayer. Some, I will admit, were not of God, but many I believe were of God. I then challenged her to spend more quiet time with the Lord, to learn to listen with her heart. This changed the quality and depth of her prayer experience exponentially.

Listening in prayer is a blessing that I learned the hard way early in my priesthood. Like my dear Aunt, I am a strong type “A” person. As a newly ordained priest I was going to set the world on fire for the Lord in my first weeks in the parish. Many, perhaps most, of my plans and initiatives fizzled. Failure brought me to my knees and opened my heart to listen to the Lord. Then I repeatedly heard the words of Mother Mary from the Gospel Parable of *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, “Do whatever He tells you.” My priesthood changed when I came to the realization that I was not in control, Jesus is!

I also learned to spend more time in prayer listening and asking for guidance in my preaching. I always approached the Lord with this question, “Lord what do you want your beloved children to hear?” And I would pray, “Lord, let it be Your words and not mine.” Preaching suddenly became almost effortless as I surrendered to the Lord. For that I am eternally grateful!

We all have a little Martha and Mary in us. They are sisters. Both are necessary.

