

Homily – My Soul Is Full of Gratitude

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There are some days that I don't feel very grateful to God. It may be something has gone wrong, or I have done something wrong. It may be about family, or relationships or even my work here at St. Barnabas. There are just some days that I don't feel very grateful, and in the morning I just want to stay in bed.

Now, in my household staying in bed is not very easy. Ben, the dog, will sit by the bed and let out little sighs. Maybe he needs to go outside, and if I open my eyes and look at him he just stares back at me with his soulful brown eyes until I get out of bed. Our two cats are little more direct. They just jump into the bed and start sitting on me. One of the cats will start mewling, and she is quite clear that she wants to be fed. At my household it can be difficult to stay in bed in the morning, even on those mornings in which I am not feeling very thankful for the day.

For me this type of morning doesn't happen very often. Though, with the death of my dad two weeks ago, I have had a few of these mornings recently.

I know that some of you experience these mornings more frequently. You have a lot of mornings in which you don't feel very grateful to God. Or, if you don't have this experience then you may have a loved one who in this place.

Is it harder to have a loved one in a funk or for you to be there yourself?

Be that as it may, you know what I mean. Life is out of sorts when we forget, reject or just slip away from gratitude to God.

For, we were made to be grateful to God. Each and every one of us was created to be in a constant state of gratitude to God. We were made to worship God and to be thankful for our many blessings.

Karl Barth is a highly respected Christian theologian from about one hundred years ago. Barth was fond of saying that “the basic human response to God is gratitude, not fear and trembling, not guilt and dread, but thanksgiving.”

Whether we are aware of our blessings or not, whether we even feel blessed or not, we are to lift up praises to God and worship.

The Bible, and especially the Psalter, command us to praise and thank God. This morning Psalm 61 began with *“Be joyful in God, all you lands; sing the glory of his Name; sing the glory of his praise.”*

C. S. Lewis, another theologian and writer from one hundred years ago observed the connection between gratitude and personal well-being.” He wrote, “I noticed how the humblest and at the same time most balanced minds praise the most, while the cranks, misfits, and malcontents praise the least. Praise almost seems to be inner health made audible.”

Let me repeat that last part, “Praise almost seems to be inner health made audible.”

And, there is a lot of evidence that Jesus was very aware of this.

In today’s Gospel story about the healing of the ten lepers, the emphasis is on the one leper who came back to thank Jesus and praise God for the blessing that had been given to him.

There is no indication of why one of the healed lepers returned, but it is quite clear that his gratitude gave him great benefit above and beyond healing of the body. This tenth leper was also lifted up in mind and spirit.

Let me explain. I think there are at least three parts of self – body, mind, and spirit. And, I believe these three parts of self impact one another. For example, if the physical part of self is unhealthy then it can drag down the

mental and spiritual parts of self. Conversely, if the mental part of self is bright, then it can lift the other two parts of self.

I believe that by coming back to give thanks to Jesus and praise to God, this tenth, wise leper was able to expand his healing of leprosy to include the lifting of his mind and spirit. This man received the greater healing. He was healed in body, mind, AND spirit. As we heard in today's story, Jesus knows the benefits of gratitude to God

Now, WebMD is a popular website for those that are trying to learn about ailments and health issues. The site was launched back in 2006 with the following on its landing page.

The connection between gratitude and health actually goes back a long way. Thousands of years of literature talk about the benefits of cultivating gratefulness as a virtue. Throughout history, philosophers and religious leaders have extolled gratitude as a virtue integral to health and well-being. WebMD says that, through a recent movement called positive psychology, mental health professionals are taking a close look at how virtues such as gratitude can benefit our health. And they're reaping some promising results.

Maybe you are like me, but I always like it when there is congruence between our understanding of spirituality and our understanding of medicine. WebMD validates and reiterates the teachings of Jesus in today's gospel story. Gratitude can provide the greater healing.

But, note that it is not gratitude that Jesus references at the end of today's reading, but faith. Jesus *"said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."*

And, this is one of those verses in the Bible that has done as much harm as good. *"Your faith has made you well."*

Throughout the centuries, Christians have thought of faith and healing in a cause and effect relationship. You pray for something, and either it happens or it doesn't.

To our shame, there has been a mistaken belief that if you pray the right way or have the right faith then healing will occur. Conversely, if you don't get healed then your faith was not great enough. In other words, you kept healing from happening because you weren't good enough. This way of thinking is wrong. Hit the delete-key on this!

Instead, there is a better link between faith and healing that has to do with gratitude. Gratitude has to do with the greater healing. It is life giving. And, with today's gospel story, Jesus teaches us that by definition, faith and gratitude are very closely related. They go hand in hand. For you see, faith without gratitude is not faith at all.

As in the story of the mustard seed, today we hear Jesus telling us not to be concerned with the quantity of our faith. Rather, Jesus is teaching us about the nature of faith. In short, to "have faith" is to live it, and to live it is to give thanks. It is living a great life of gratitude that constitutes living a life of faith— this is the grateful sort of faith that has made this tenth leper from Samaria truly and deeply well.

For me, faith and gratitude are two words for the same thing: to practice gratitude is to practice faith. And, if this is not something we have, but something we do— something we live— then in living we express our complete trust in God. When we practice gratitude, we find that faith is given in abundance, and overflowing.

Now, to practice gratitude intentionally changes an individual life, but it also changes the character of a congregation. When Christians practice gratitude they come to worship not just to "get something out of it", but to give thanks and praise to God. Stewardship is transformed from fund raising to the glad gratitude of joyful givers. The mission of the church changes from ethical duty to the work of grateful hands and hearts. Prayer

includes not only our intercessions and supplications, but also our thanksgivings at the table.

My prayer for each of you today is that you wake up each morning with a heart of gratitude to God, and that it see you through your day. Our many blessings are from God, so we should thank God. I've been reminded in the last two weeks to cherish and be grateful for the time that we have together. So, I thank God for the life of my dad. May your days and nights be full of gratitude to God.