

One Said Thank You

You can almost hear the 9 as they continued on their way: “Man, are we smart or what? We called out to just the right guy at just the right time and look! We’re clean! Back home we go to mothers and brothers and sisters and wives and children! Back to work! Back to our lives! Man, are we smart!”

Or perhaps it was this: “After all we’ve suffered through, being outcasts and pariahs, all those years of being nobodies; we deserve to be healed!”

Or maybe it was this: “See, I knew if we prayed hard enough, God would give us what we want!”

As the 9 continued to walk down the road, delighted at their good fortune, only 1 returns. An illegal immigrant. Only 1 turns back to say “thank you.” Only 1 recognizes, only 1 sees, that he has been on the receiving end of pure, undeserved, unmerited, grace. Only 1. And an illegal alien at that.

Jesus sees the 10 and feels for them. All 10 see that they are made well. But only one sees where that wellness comes from.

“Blessed are those with eyes to see.”

Today’s gospel really is the perfect story of life in the 21st century. Everyday, good things happen to we modern people. We have, for most of us, an abundance of food, of clothing, of creature comforts. We are surrounded by fine medical care, easy transportation, air conditioning, and Costco’s!

And 9 out of 10 will say: “We’ve worked hard!” “We’ve sweated!” “We’ve created these comforts!” “We deserve these comforts!” “Good for us!”

Perhaps only 1 will take a look around, with eyes that see, and fall to the ground, thanking God for all of this abundance.

My friends in AA call it an “attitude of gratitude”. An “attitude of gratitude.” Especially in these tough economic times. Especially in days like these when we are surrounded by fear mongerers, consumed with shrill and divisive political voices; especially now, an attitude of gratitude goes a long way in bending our world toward the kingdom, despite the many forces intent on bending it the other way.

An attitude of gratitude is the result of slowly waking up to a life that is shot full of God’s grace; and coming to see God’s grace in the miracle of, say, a vegetable garden; in the joyful shouts of the little ones; in the air that we breath and the health we enjoy.

An attitude of gratitude steps into God’s world and recognizes it *as God’s world*. No matter the circumstances, an attitude of gratitude sees God’s hand everywhere. It takes grateful eyes to see. It also takes hands that are willing to get dirty; to step outside of my comfort zone; to become involved in the lives of those who are different from me.

When we combine an attitude of gratitude with a real effort to mingle and mix with the whole motley crew called as God’s family; that’s when miracles happen!

In that mixing, like yeast with flour, something marvelous begins to grow. Something new comes into being. Something

mysterious and strange, yet gentle and inviting; it peeks out from around the corner, beckoning us to come and see.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu this week summed up what a lifetime of living in an attitude of gratitude revealed, when he insists that: “The texture of our universe is one where there is no question at all but that good and laughter and justice will prevail.”

Martin Luther King, Jr., during the most trying days of the civil rights movement, said with great passion that while the arc of the universe is long, it bends toward justice.

One can only believe these things if one is cloaked with an attitude of gratitude.

Tom Long tells of moving to a new city and joining a new church. A number of other new folks had recently attended so the minister invited them over one night for dinner. During the meal, the conversation turned to why these folks had joined. One was a musician, who liked the music at the church. Another had children and the church had a great youth program. Another just liked the minister,

Then it got around to Sam’s turn. Sam said he had been addicted to meth, and one day had stumbled into the church, begging for help. The director of the church outreach center said: “We’ve spent our budget for the month. I can’t get you into treatment until next month. But if you’ll stay with us, we’ll stay with you.” She took Sam’s hand, they kneeled down together, and prayed.

He stayed and got into a treatment program. “I’ve been sober for 3 years now,” Sam said, and the reason I joined this church is that God saved me in this church!”

Tom Long relates how the other folks looked sheepishly around the dinner table at each other. “We were there for the music and the parking; he was there for the salvation.”

A few weeks later, the parish newsletter noted that Sam was in jail. Tom went to see him, to ask what had happened.

“I was working in the outreach center,” Sam replied, “counseling people like myself; telling them that they could do right. But then I realized, I hadn’t done right myself. I had a warrant out for my arrest. It was an old warrant. So old it probably never would have caught up with me, but I knew about it. So, on Christmas Eve, I turned myself in.”

Sam went on: “I’ll be out by Easter! I can’t wait to worship at the church on Easter! But in the meantime, I’ve got an outreach center going on in the jail. A lot of people can’t read or write, so I write letters to their wives and sweethearts, telling them that they miss them and love them.”

“Every night, we have a prayer meeting. Just a few show up. But we pray for the other prisoners, and for the guards.”
[Brosend, The Preaching of Jesus, 120-1]

10 were healed. 1 came back to say, “thank you.”

May God’s grace give to each of us an attitude of gratitude this day.

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