

HOMILY OF MOST REVEREND CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
THANKSGIVING DAY
LITTLE FLOWER CHURCH, BETHESDA, MARYLAND
NOVEMBER 23, 2017

I want to wish you a very Happy Thanksgiving! I am particularly grateful to Msgr. Vaghi for his hospitality, allowing me to continue this traditional visit of the Apostolic Nuncio to your parish on Thanksgiving Day. As the personal representative of the Holy Father, I want to assure you of his spiritual closeness and paternally affection as you gather with family and friends to give thanks to God. We have gathered as children of the one God and Father of us all to give thanks for the many blessings we have received. Truly this country has been blessed with abundance, not only with natural resources and material blessing, but also with freedom - including the freedom to worship God and render Him thanks.

Of the many things for which we give thanks to the Eternal Father, the greatest is His Only Begotten Son, the Lord Jesus, who comes to offer us salvation. In the Gospel today, Jesus is journeying with His disciples to Jerusalem, where He will complete His mission by giving Himself up for us on the Cross. On his journey, he passes through Samaria, and he encounters ten lepers.

Lepers were forced to live at the peripheries of society. They lived in poverty and loneliness. They were unable to work, to be with their families, or even to go up to the Temple. Besides poverty and loneliness, the only thing a leper was assured of was death. Despite the stigma and fear that surrounded the lepers, Jesus did not shy away from them. He went to the "peripheries". Despite their great suffering, the lepers had not completely lost hope. They placed their trust in Jesus, who looked upon them with compassion, and he told them to show themselves to the priests in accordance with the Levitical law. With a living faith and in obedience, they began their journey to Jerusalem and they were healed.

Nine of the ten continued their journey, but it was only the Samaritan, the one who was most despised, who returned, glorifying God and through Himself at the feet of the Redeemer, giving thanks to God. The other nine perhaps were focused only on the gift they had received – their health – and not on the Giver of the gift. They immediately rushed to resume their human relationships and their previous way of life. While they were happy to be healed, they were a little self-referential, concerned with their good fortune.

Rather than being a self-referential Church, the Holy Father calls us to be a Church that goes forth. We go forth on a mission to proclaim the glory of God and to tell others what God has done for us. The Samaritan had his priorities right. The Samaritan, a foreigner, experienced his healing as a grace, as an unmerited gift, that in turn, demanded his love. He returned to give thanks to God. His encounter with Jesus had changed his life. Furthermore, Jesus said, "*Rise. Your faith has saved you.*" There is a difference between healing and salvation.

Jesus brings us salvation. He is headed to Jerusalem to give His life as a ransom for the many upon the altar of the Cross. It is this sacrifice of Calvary which we offer at each Mass. The word Eucharist means Thanksgiving. Of all the blessings that we have received from God, none is greater than the gift of His Son whom we receive in Holy Communion and who offers us forgiveness of our sins, healing inside and out.

I wonder how the Samaritan lived in the days that followed his encounter with the Lord. Was his whole life now marked by a spirituality of gratitude? How is our life changed by our encounter with the Lord in His Word, in his ministers, in this community of faith, and in the Eucharist? Let us enter more deeply into this liturgy so that we might experience it more deeply as a grace and a gift that in turn demands that we love God and neighbor, so that at the end of the Mass we can truly say, "Thanks be to God."