

**HOMILY OF MOST REVEREND CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES**  
**THANKSGIVING DAY**  
**LITTLE FLOWER CHURCH, BETHESDA, MARYLAND**  
**NOVEMBER 25, 2021**

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, after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic. This was one of my first engagements in a parish when I began my mission in this country, and so I look forward to being with you each year.

As the representative of the Holy Father, I want to assure you of his prayers, spiritual closeness and paternal 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 – to thank God for our life, our health, our families, and our faith.

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 to give Him thanks. Too often we neglect the spiritual blessings God has bestowed upon us, especially in the Eucharist or in the Sacrament of Penance, by which He heals us with His mercy. Yes, we are grateful that God bestows on us grace upon grace.

In the Gospel, Jesus was journeying with His disciples to Jerusalem, where He will complete His mission by giving Himself up for us on the Cross. On the way, He passed through Samaria, and he encounters ten lepers. It was only the Samaritan, the one who was most despised, who returned, glorifying God and threw Himself at the feet of the Redeemer, giving thanks to God.

Why does Jesus stress that the one who returned was a Samaritan, a foreigner? Why does he emphasize that none of the Jews he had healed of leprosy returned to thank God? I think the reason is because the Jews should have been particularly well-prepared to say thanks. The Jews had many psalms of Thanksgiving that they were regularly praying that should have made returning to thank Jesus for the miracle much easier. How often they would have heard the words of the Psalmist: *Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever!*

We, as Catholics, have not only the psalms and the Old Testament writings, but we have the Gospels, the New Testament writings, the Fathers of the Church, the lives of the saints, and the sacraments. We have those people – our clergy, religious, parents and grandparents – who have nurtured our faith and supported us. We should always render thanks to God for the life and salvation He offers us.

The other nine lepers in the passage 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. The leper was truly changed by His encounter with Christ.

The Samaritan, in contrast to the other nine lepers, had his priorities right. He experienced his healing as a grace, an unmerited gift, which demanded a response of 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.*” He was offered more than healing; he was offered salvation!

The example of the leper teaches us about the need for gratitude. As Catholics, it is essential to learn to thank the Lord always and everywhere as a sweet duty that leads us more securely to salvation. Like the Jews in the desert, who were tired of their rotten food and longed for their leeks which they had in Egypt, we can often complain, forgetting about what God has done for us and obsessing about what we do not have rather than gratefully thanking God for His blessings.

The liturgy educates us in the art of thanksgiving. There is a very important dialogue that takes place in the heart of every Mass at the Preface. There the priest prays, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God,” and everyone responds, “It is right and just.” The priest then addresses God the Father and declares, “It is right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks.”

It is not only our duty — and it is a duty for us to thank the Lord who has given us life and every other blessing — but it is also our salvation. Just as the grateful Samaritan leper received upon his return a far greater miracle than the cure of leprosy — when Jesus told him, “Your faith has saved you” — so when we thank the Lord we are also introduced into the mystery of *salvation* by faith. This gift is unmerited and should fill our hearts with gratitude.

Although it is right and just to give the Lord thanks, the priest also prays, adding “always and everywhere.” We are called to thank the Lord at all times and in every place, not only in moments of joy at the birth of a new child, at a wedding, or when we find success at school or work, but also in those difficult times of suffering, death and even failure. While we set aside a special day for thanksgiving, our interior attitude must always be one of gratitude, especially for the offer of 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 — for the forgiveness of sins — which we offer at each Mass. This is the Good News: God comes to save us! Even the word Eucharist means thanksgiving.

Let us enter more deeply into this liturgy so that we might experience the Eucharist 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.”

Each Thanksgiving, we hear this Gospel of the Samaritan leper. Perhaps, we would do well to reflect on how he lived following his encounter with Jesus. Was his whole life now marked by a spirituality of gratitude? Is ours? We would do well to follow the leper’s example, throwing ourselves at the feet of Jesus, thanking Him, and glorifying God!