

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES,  
THANKSGIVING DAY, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2018  
LITTLE FLOWER CHURCH,  
BETHESDA, MARYLAND**

I want to wish you a very Happy Thanksgiving! I am particularly grateful to Msgr. Vaghi for his hospitality, allowing me to visit your parish for the third time on Thanksgiving Day. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, 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 gather as God's children to give thanks for the many blessings we have received, not only the material blessings but especially the blessing of freedom, including the freedom to worship to God who has provided us with every good gift. These days it is fashionable to start celebrating Christmas right after Halloween; perhaps, today, we can look ahead to the words we will hear on Christmas, from Paul's letter to Titus: "*when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.*"

Of all the things we should be grateful for it is the mercy and love that comes to us in Christ Jesus. The love of God appeared – not only to the wealthy and powerful, but also to the little ones of the earth. The Word of God came in the Flesh to save us. In the Gospel, he appeared to ten lepers. We should ask: "Where were the other rabbis? Why did they not go to the lepers?"

Perhaps, it was because they were afraid – afraid of becoming unclean, afraid of sickness, afraid of the banishment from society that would follow. To have leprosy in the ancient world was about the worst thing that could happen to you. Lepers had to live apart from society, cut off from their family and friends. They lived a poverty of loneliness. Those afflicted with the disease often felt that they were cut off from God because they could not go to the synagogue on the sabbath or to the Temple for major feasts. No one could approach within fifty feet of a leper without the leper having to provide a warning with the shake of a rattle and the cry, "Unclean! Unclean!"

Fear kept many away from the lepers, but Jesus drew near. *Perfect love casts out all fear.* Jesus had genuine compassion for them and desired to show them mercy. His desire met their desire, which was manifested in the cry, "*Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!*"

He responded, "*Go, show yourselves to the priests,*" because priests were the only ones under the Mosaic law who were able to pronounce a leper healed and return him or her to society. Even to say this was to imply that He had cured them already. It took an act of faith on their part to start journeying to find a priest simply on His word, but that is exactly what they did. They began the journey of reconciliation with and reintegration to the community.

As they were journeying, St. Luke tells us that one of them, a Samaritan, realizing he had been healed, turned around. Before he would show himself to the priests, he wanted to thank the

one who had performed a miracle. Glorifying God, he came to Jesus, fell at his feet, and thanked him.

Jesus' words are very powerful. "*Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine?*" He knew he had cured all ten of *leprosy*, but only one was showing gratitude. Jesus then pointed out that the man who returned was a Samaritan, someone for whom the Jews had centuries of animosity as those who did not worship God aright. "*Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?*"

Jesus was really asking, "Where are those who are accustomed to pray, "*Give thanks to the Lord who is good, whose love endures forever!*" (Ps 107:1; Ps 118:1) or who chant, "*With my whole being I sing endless praise to you. O Lord, my God, forever will I give you thanks*" (Ps 30:13)? They did not return. Only the Samaritan, the most despised of the outcasts, returned, realizing that a Jewish rabbi had compassion on him – a Samaritan with a death sentence. The Samaritan offered true worship – He glorified God and fell at the feet of Jesus, a posture of adoration and gratitude.

Jesus seeing his actions and hearing his words, which flowed from a grateful heart, said, "*Stand up and go; your faith has saved you.*" Ten were healed, but of the ten, how many were saved? Jesus brings us salvation, which is more than physical healing. Recall that when Jesus encountered the lepers, he was journeying toward Jerusalem - 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.

To enter more deeply into the Mass is to enter into more deeply into Jesus' prayer of gratitude to His Father – a gratitude which He shows by offering Himself for us. 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. The grace of God has appeared!

But how do we respond to this grace? The fact is that many times, despite the mercy and grace we receive, we are not that grateful. Not only do we not give God thanks and praise at all times and in every circumstance but often we do the opposite: we complain. Rather than expressing gratitude for what we have, we murmur about what we don't have or complain that others have more. We demand more and more from God, who could rightly say, "I gave you my Son, and you still want more?!"

Jesus's question to the leper – *Where are the other nine?* – should pierce us to the heart. Am I one of the other nine? Today is a day to stop and to commit to being the one who realizes what God has done and who returns to give thanks. It is day to contemplate all that God has given us – the beauty of this day and of creation; our family and friends; this country and its freedom, with all the promises it brings; and above all, His Son, who gives us the promise of eternal life. For what are you truly grateful? Before you eat your turkey and stuffing, your cranberries and pumpkin pie, stop and *give thanks to the Lord, for He is good and His great love is without end!*