

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

This week's Gospel reading talks about the importance of both being grateful to God and expressing our gratitude to Him. We run to God whenever we have a need for His help. But, are we just as energetic in thanking Him for all of His blessings to us?

LUKE 17: 12-19 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: 17:13 And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,

16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?

18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

If we read this Gospel passage on a surface level, we are reminded how often people take for granted God's blessings and overlook the need to give thanks to Him. People easily call out to God when they have a special need but forget about thanking Him when He responds. Even this simple level of reading provides for us this important lesson for our spiritual life. But, if we stop there, we deprive ourselves of hearing God's Word which is mystical and very profound. So much important information is offered to us if we examine it more deeply. The church fathers explain to us that although we may not be suffering from leprosy which affected people during Christ's time, we should be aware that all of us do suffer from a much more subtle form of spiritual leprosy. This leprosy is our sinfulness. And just as it was only the Savior who was able to make the sick men well, it is only the Savior who is able to and continually does heal us from our malady. Because physically leprosy was so visible, painful and deadly, it was not hard for the ten men to recognize what they were suffering from and what was the only way for them to get well. Thus, they pleaded with the Savior for mercy.

Unfortunately, spiritual leprosy is much more subtle, and the sick person often does not recognize how sick he really is. And it is even more deadly because leprosy eventually kills only the person's body, while untreated spiritual leprosy results in the spiritual death of the whole person. The good news, however, is that it is easily treated and cured. It only requires that the person recognize that he is sick and what this sickness is, and then appeal to God for mercy through repentance. If we do, our loving Father immediately comes to our help and makes us well. What we need to understand, though, is that our repentance has to be persistent and practised daily. Since we continually sin, we need to remember to constantly and sincerely cry out to our Healer with the words of the ten men in this Gospel, "Lord have mercy"; And we confirm our repentance by going to confession and partaking of the Body and Blood of our Savior. The more often that we confess and commune, the more firm and complete is our healing.

Our Heavenly Father lovingly watches over us continually to protect us from harm. But we repeatedly and continually transgress against Him and commit sin. Despite this, He mercifully accepts us when we run to Him for forgiveness and help. Do we show Him our gratitude for His never-ending mercy? Or do we take everything for granted? He protects us when we are most vulnerable as we sleep at night. Do we thank Him when we awake? He blesses us each day

with everything that we need during the day. Do we thank Him before we go to sleep? Multitudes are homeless around the world, suffering through severe weather conditions. We have nice, warm and comfortable homes. Do we see God's hand in this, or is it something that we have attained thanks to our own efforts? We eat quite well. So well in fact that some of us are called "foodies". At the same time, millions around the world are starving or malnourished. Do we pray before and after our meals, seeing once again God's blessing to us? In fact, as Scripture tells us that no one hair falls out of our head without the will of God. Do we understand all of this and appreciate it? And, how often do we thank Him?

My dear brothers and sisters, giving thanks to God for what He does for us is not a hard thing to do. We just need to organize our life in such a way that giving thanks is something that is part of who we are. And let us always remember to thank God in the most important way, the way that shows Him our gratitude. This is to sincerely and with His Grace strive not to repeat the mistakes for which we are asking forgiveness. Our repentance is in vain if we ask Him for forgiveness and yet have no intention to correct ourselves. Yes, we will sin again and again. And God will forgive us again and again. But only if we sincerely try to use His Grace to overcome our weakness and become better people.

With Love in Christ,  
Archpriest Serge Kota