

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Gratitude Heals and Changes Us

2 Kings 5:14-17; Psalm 98:1,2-3,4; 2 Timothy 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19

My mother, Marcelina Aguilar Hewe, passed away on October 2, 2022, at 4:33 pm in the hospital. She was no longer eating for three days, and her body showed signs of expiration from this world. My sister, who takes care of her and witnessed how her condition declined and what she went through over the years, could only pray to God, "Lord, take her with you now." But I had a different disposition in those three days; I was praying and hoping she would recover as she did before so we could celebrate her 90th birthday.

As I recall those intense periods of prayers, I think it was a selfish prayer, not knowing that her soul was ready to face her creator. While it is painful to understand and accept her passing away, I find comfort in those days I was with her. I am grateful to God for the month I stay with her last August. I recall I mentioned in my letter/homily for the 23rd Sunday that I had to say farewell to her five times the day I left. I said, "Nanay, I am going back to Hawaii." She responded, "don't go home yet," while holding my hands. Then, later I have to bring and show her my luggage and tell her again, "Nanay, I am going now to the airport." She would say, you still have time yet." And finally, I said, "I will be late. I will come back next year." She looked at me, raising her eyebrows with sadness, and said, "I know you will come back. Take care."

Every time we bid farewell to our loved ones would mean a little act of letting go and letting God. Something inside of us is plucked out or given away. There are big and small moments of letting go and letting God happen in our lives, and I believe our constancy of being grateful to God helps us go through the motion of "letting go and letting God" in life. Gratitude, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, opens our hearts to God's healing love and leads us to touch other people in ways beyond our imagination. It is very much pronounced in all our readings this Sunday.

In our first reading, Naaman could not help but express his thanks to God; he loaded up his cart with soil from the Holy Land to build an altar at home to the God of Israel. And he promised to worship no other god from that day forward. Naaman realized that he owed a debt of gratitude to God that he could never be fully repaid. His gratefulness leads him to change his life. On the other hand, St. Paul expresses his gratitude for being loved by God, forgiven, chosen, and sent on a mission. He always remembers Jesus as the source of all he is and sees everything as a blessing of God, even his trials in life. So he reminded Timothy to remember Jesus always and to labor in his name.

In the Gospel, one of the ten lepers cured by Jesus returned after showing himself to a priest to thank Jesus. Instead of rejoicing his friends and family, he returned to express his gratitude. He gave importance and celebrated first with the one who is the source of healing. By coming back, he got full benefit from his encounter with Jesus. His spirit and body were healed by acknowledging the source of his newfound health. The other nine lacked something --- a failure to show an appreciation -- keeping everything for themselves and giving nothing back. They missed the incredible richness and inner joy that comes from giving thanks.

The stories we heard are gentle reminders: that the basic posture we must always have before God is one of praise and thanksgiving. We express it most clearly during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass when we begin the great Eucharistic Prayer. It is the great thanksgiving prayer because the word "Eucharist" literally means thanksgiving. During this prayer, we engaged in prayerful dialogue: the priest says, "Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God." And we respond: "It is right to give him thanks and praise." And then the priest continues: "Father, it is our duty and our salvation always and everywhere to give you thanks." And why? Not just because something good might have happened to us during the week, not because of any one particular thing, but rather because of our constant, continued, permanent condition of being alive and saved by the healing, merciful, forgiving, sustaining presence of God right here and now in the world.

The real worth of our love for God flows from our ability to recognize and appreciate God's blessings, and the more we are aware and thankful to him, the more we will be open to receiving the joy of his providential care. Let us not allow the day to pass without thanking God for the good things of life, even the crosses and the trials that put us to the test, for it not only leads us to care for others but also has a gift of healing!

I thank you for all your support, comforting thoughts, and assurance of prayers for our family and the repose of the soul of my mother.

God bless you.

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor