

## **28<sup>th</sup> Sunday, Ordinary Time—**

I have this friend. His ethnic and religious background is—Jewish. Just a couple days ago, he was talking about Jewish holy days just celebrated. They're called the Jewish High Holy Days—the Jewish New Year called Rosh Hashanah—and Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement for sins.

During our conversation, he called attention to five words he said are familiar to most Jewish people throughout Wisconsin and the nation. The words are:

“Know Before Whom You Stand.” He explained what these words mean. He said: “‘Know before whom you stand’—was written above a big, ancient, gold-encrusted case—what the Bible calls the Ark of the Covenant. In ancient times, the Ark held sacred, religious things, including the tablets of the Ten Commandments.”

My friend said that, today, synagogues around the world have smaller copies of that original Ark, they have Scriptures inside, and the cases bear the same words the original Ark had: “Know before whom you stand.”

He went on to say that during the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Jewish people of faith do a self-examination of themselves before Almighty God and express thanks.

I think what my friend was basically saying is that, every year, Jewish people are reminded, in a powerful and personal way, to remember God's presence in their lives, their need for God's mercy and love, and their own loving, respectful, and appreciative relationship before God.

To be humbled by that relationship.

To be moved by it, lessening egocentrism.

To experience, somehow, a sense of awe and thankfulness for all we have from God, and maybe a sense of some unworthiness.

*Know before whom you stand.*

So, how does all this carry over into today's Scriptures we just heard? Well, in today's Gospel, only one of the 10 lepers—all Jewish men—lived out those Ark-of-the-Covenant words of humility and thankfulness.

He is the only cured man who returns to Jesus, who falls to his knees, and who thanks him. And... because of that, he is saved. And the others? Well, we can understand their egocentrism, their understandable, self-centered joy. But they forgot before whom they had stood—and would always stand—and, as a result, they forgot to return and say thanks.

This Gospel passage has much to teach us about thankfulness, but also about a subject touched on in last week's Gospel. It is...faith. Faith.

You might recall that, in last week's reading from Luke, Jesus tells his followers they need only faith the size of a mustard seed because, like a mustard seed, their faith can grow and grow into something big.

This week, that subject of faith comes up again, and the conclusions we find may be

even more surprising. Three points are worth remembering. First, faith is active. In today's Gospel, the returning, thanks-saying man who had the frightening, slow-death skin disease called leprosy and who had been cured by Jesus, took the initiative to return to the Lord and to give him his joyful and humble appreciation.

As Luke puts it: "He fell at his feet and thanked him."

Or, to paraphrase those words inscribed over the Arc of the Covenant: "Faith reveals to you before whom you stand."

It calls you to be grateful—sometimes even to fall to your knees in gratitude like the cured man in the Gospel. And it takes nothing for granted—nothing in...entitlement.

Secondly, faith goes beyond—it transcends—labels or limitations—and so does God.

You might remember a few weeks ago, we heard the parable of The Good Samaritan. And you might consider our Gospel today as the sequel to that because both are about God's compassion and care—God's mercy.

Both the Good Samaritan Gospel and our Gospel today appear in the Gospel of St. Luke, the only evangelist whom scholars believe was not Jewish. He was from Syria, NOT Israel, and had an educated, Greek background.

Luke wrote his Gospel, in part, to reach people like himself, and so he makes special mention of those who are foreigners, like Samaritans, and those who are on the margins—who are on the outside—people like those with that terrible leprosy skin disease. Luke reminds us that God's mercy reaches out for everyone and that his saving love is for all. It does not...discriminate.

Finally, would you say that one of the most powerful testaments of faith is gratitude? Would you say that?

It's no accident that today's Gospel is the very one we hear every year during Thanksgiving Day Mass. But gratitude doesn't need to wait until a Thursday in November. We can—and really need—to make an "attitude of gratitude" a way of life, a way of living.

As we draw closer to the end of our Christian Calendar Year next month, and as our Scriptures will reflect more of the world's troubles and stresses, today's Scripture can stay with us, infusing the beauty and depth and power of God's mercy—and continuing to speak to each of us...because each of us is, in some way, an outsider like those 10 men cured in the Gospel. Each of us has been affected by sin. And some of us may feel like outsiders in other ways, as well. Some of us may feel unlovable. Some of us may feel we aren't smart enough. Rich enough. Popular enough. Pretty enough. Thin enough. Young enough. We live in a culture that judges harshly...and excludes mercilessly.

But Jesus stands in contradiction to that way of thinking and feeling. He accepts us—whoever we are—however we are. He reaches out to us in all our brokenness, with all our scars, with all our sins. God's mercy is forever. And to that, all we can say is, quite simply: "Thank God."

**As we prepare to receive Holy Eucharist today, we can realize we are called to a deeper sense of wonder and, yes, gratitude. The word “Eucharist,” after all, means “thanksgiving.” As we come forward to receive near the altar of the Lord, we can give thanks for this miracle, this gift of the Lord himself, realizing that as we come forward and extend our hands, we are being given something incomparable—something beyond measure.**

**The words above the Arc of the Covenant speak to us here and now and at Holy Communion, and always: “Know before whom you stand.” And, yes, truly, it all comes down to faith. And we can pray and hope—which is a kind of prayer in itself—that our faith can embrace that amazing reality, with all that it implies.**

**For...if we truly appreciate that—in all its richness and beauty and mercy and love—how could we not do what the Gospel’s cured man must have done after thanking the Lord personally. He must have continued throughout his life to give thanks as often as he could—as we probably should be doing every chance we get...right?**

**Plz give it some thought....**