

Eucharistic Thanks

Today's Gospel lesson is obviously about giving thanks to God. That's a no-brainer. Nobody is going to disagree or argue, *nor should they*. The message is clear; so clear, in fact, that this same Gospel lesson is also appointed every single year to be the Gospel reading for Thanksgiving Day. That's how obvious it is.

Unfortunately, though, because the message is *so* clear, we often wind up missing the true wisdom that our Lord endeavors to teach us in this lesson. And when this is the case; when we stop *interrogating* the text and stop seeking wisdom from the Holy Spirit, and instead go on cruise-control, arrogantly assuming that we *already* know everything there is to know about the text; that's when a lot of ignorance and bad, dangerous theology can wind up trespassing in and taking over. Case in point: Because we think we know it so well, this lesson is often treated *more as an etiquette lesson than a Gospel lesson*. In fact, this Gospel lesson is often butchered and corrupted, wrongly turned into nothing more than Law; a lesson on what to do and what not to do. "*Don't be like the nine lepers, who didn't give thanks. Do be like the Samaritan leper, who did return and give thanks. Always say thank you!*"

Folks: There is SO MUCH more here than a mere primer on proper etiquette. The original Greek tells us that the Samaritan, when he had realized that he had been made well, made an abrupt about-face and returned to Jesus, glorifying God with a loud voice, falling on his face at Jesus' feet and *eucharisto auto*, which we translate as, "gave thanks to Him." *What does this mean? What might we be missing?*

Let's begin with the fact that this guy returned back to Jesus in order to *glorify God*. Remember: All ten guys were on their way to the Temple. They had to show themselves to the high priest and offer up the proper sacrifices and offerings in order to be declared "clean" and welcomed back into worship and fellowship. *They were all going to be in God's house and presence!* And yet...this lowly Samaritan leper is the ONLY one who recognized God in the presence and person of Jesus. Now all ten, to their credit, did initially cry out to Jesus to have mercy on them. They all cried to Jesus for healing. *That's commendable. We don't want to lose sight of this.* However...when it came time to be in God's presence, where did they look? Where did they go? Maybe the better question is: Where did they NOT look for God? In the wisdom of faith, the Samaritan *knew* where to look. He returned to Jesus *and glorified God*; that is, he gave glory to God in the flesh, mercifully standing before him in his very presence.

There's also the fact that this Samaritan fell at Jesus' feet in praise and thanksgiving. This is the posture of faithful repentance and humility. This is the posture of prayer. This is the posture of repentant thanksgiving. This guy doesn't come to Jesus like Jesus is his buddy or bro. They're not equals—not even close—and he acknowledges this. He returns to Jesus and immediately prostrates himself—*falls flat on his face at Jesus' feet*—and praises Him for such undeserved mercy and goodness. He wasn't too proud to take such a lowly position.

Speaking of pride, did you notice what's **NOT** said in all this (and this is true of all ten lepers)? Not once did ANY of these guys try to cut a deal. "*Jesus, Master, if you are merciful to us just this one time, we'll do this, that, and the other thing for you. If you scratch our back, we'll scratch yours.*" Not once did ANY of these guys list off all their prideful accomplishments. "*Jesus, I've volunteered this much. I've given this much. I do this, that, and the other thing, and I don't do all those things that all those other hypocrites and sinners do. Throw me a bone here, Jesus. I think I deserve a little mercy. I think my record proves that I've earned it.*" Nope. You don't hear it. You don't hear it from a single one of these guys. Unfortunately, the reflection in the mirror can't exactly confess this same truth, can it? ***The wise ones will admit it. The others try and justify it.***

And then there's the biggest kicker of all; probably one of the most often over-looked and missed parts of the entire text: This lowly guy return to Jesus, prostrates himself as glorifies God, and *eucharisto auto*; that is, he gives thanks to Him. Now, you don't have to be a Greek scholar or hold a graduate degree in theology to hear the word "***eucharist.***" It's right there, hiding in plain sight. I want you to think about this, because the entire meaning of the lesson is wrapped up in these simple words.

Look here [the altar]. Here you see Holy Communion. Another term that is often (and rightly) used for this blessed life-giving meal is "eucharist." For those of you who think that sounds "too Catholic," you're only revealing how ***truly ignorant*** you really are when it comes to this undeserved gift of life, mercy, and peace. This is Christ's true body and blood, is it not? These are the fruits of Christ's victory over sin, death, and the grave, correct? Our faithful forefathers believed this, so much so, in fact, that the pastor **NEVER** gave a third-person narrative while distributing the body and blood of Christ; e.g., "*this is the body and blood of Jesus.*" Instead, he let Christ do the talking. After all, Christ is also the one distributing this gift. "*Take and eat. Take and drink. This is My body. This is My blood. As often as you do this, remember what I have said.*"

But...that's not how it's done nowadays, is it? "*Who does this guy think he is?! That's not his body! That's Jesus' body!*" Yes! And this is EXACTLY how the enthusiastic fools (those people who trusted their feelings and emotions over

Scripture) viewed it too! Read your Lutheran Confessions. (Be prepared, though, because you might find out that your beliefs aren't so Lutheran [or faithful], and are instead in agreement with the very people real, faithful Christians / Lutherans were fighting against.) *The Enthusiasts didn't get it.* They weren't wise to God's ways and wisdom, mostly because they didn't listen and refused to believe any way other than **what they wanted to believe/feel.** They already knew what they wanted to believe, and nothing was going to change their mind. They didn't understand God's means of grace (as He so clearly presents them throughout the New Testament), nor did they understand how God chooses to work, using the mouths and hands of *ordinary lowly men* to bespeak and bestow His amazing and undeserved gifts of grace, mercy, and peace upon His people. "*In the stead and by the command of my Lord and Savior....*" Folks: That's not just a rote formula pastors are taught to speak when it comes to confession and absolution (which people complain about too; e.g., "*Who does he think he is? Only God can forgive sins,*" the same exact argument the Pharisees used when Jesus forgave sins.)

The Samaritan leper had the wisdom of saving faith. He understood. He returned to Jesus and *eucharisto'd* to Him. He gave thanks to Jesus. He gave thanks and praise to God-in-the-flesh for the undeserved and overwhelming gift of mercy and life that had been so unconditionally bestowed upon him. He *eucharisto'd* Jesus, because in the wisdom of faith, he understood all that God had done for him...in spite of him.

Look to this rail. In just a few minutes, you will come forward and receive the true body and blood of your risen and victorious Lord and Master. In just a few minutes, you will come forward and receive *His real and tangible mercy and peace.* You come forward, not because you've earned it or you somehow deserve it. You come forward, not to cut a deal. "*I promise, Jesus. Hook me up. Give me what I'm praying for, and I'll be a better Christian. See. I'm taking communion. I mean it. I'm signing on the dotted line.*" Nope! If that's your mentality, just stay seated! **See me afterwards, because we NEED to talk!**

Repentant faith is different. Faith that "gets it" is just different. Repentant faith comes forward and receives this undeserved and unconditional gift of Christ's victory and mercy *empty-handed.* You come bearing nothing; nothing but the sacrifice of thanksgiving—*eucharisto.* **This is Christ for you!** This is Christ for you, not because of who you are, but because of who He is! You come forward, empty-handed, *prostrating yourself in humble, repentant joy,* letting God Himself fill you up with His life, His love, and His mercy, lowering yourself before the King of Heaven and Earth, and giving most humble and repentant thanks that Almighty God loved you so much that He willingly died and rose again for you, the very fruits of that divine mercy and victory that He Himself is holding out to you and feeding you with in your very presence at that very moment. The wisdom of faith just "gets it." I can't make you get it. I can't make you want this. I can't

make you hunger and thirst for this righteousness; the righteousness of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

One final thought before we call it a day: Notice how your God and Lord freely and unconditionally gives you this gift of eternal life **ALL THE TIME!** Even when life is absolutely crumbling all around you, and it seems like all is lost...**you are still a redeemed child of God.** This gift of Christ is ALWAYS held out to you. There is NEVER a time you're NOT redeemed and loved, in Christ and because of Christ. You have this gift and promise of Christ—ALWAYS! Wherever Christ's Word is rightly taught and His sacraments rightly administered, ***there is Christ; there is peace; there is reason to eucharisto; to give thanks.*** It doesn't matter how high the flood waters get. It doesn't matter how strong and damaging the winds are. It doesn't matter how sick or broke you are. You have God's promise that NOTHING can ever separate you from the love that He has for you, in Christ and because of Christ.

And please don't wait for the tragedy to get you lined-out and turned back to Christ. You don't have to wait for Christmas Eve or Easter Sunday to roll around. You don't have to wait for Thanksgiving Day. The wisdom of faith; the wisdom that understands ***the theology of Christ's cross and all-redeeming sacrifice,*** doesn't take a day off. It doesn't wait for the schedule to clear up in order to squeeze in a little thanksgiving. Yard work, fishing, golfing...nothing comes before Christ! God's love and mercy and providence NEVER takes a day off. The wisdom of thankful, repentant faith gets this. (*I'm always amazed that the baseball/soccer coach NEVER hears the excuses that the pastor does. We would NEVER miss practice or a game, but missing Christ is alright. After all, He knows we're good, right?"* Hmm... "Where are the other nine...?" *Jesus knew their hearts too.*)

Eucharistic faith puts the first things first. Eucharistic faith looks for and longs to be in the presence of Christ...ALWAYS. Well...here is Christ! O give thanks unto the Lord—***eucharisto unto the Lord***—in all times and in all places, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever. You're living proof of it. Here [the altar] is His living proof. Does it get any more obvious than this?!

AMEN