

Misery loves company, they say. And so it is that we see ten miserable lepers huddled together. The only requirement for inclusion in this group is that you have leprosy. Even a lone Samaritan is included. No longer is he simply a dreadful Samaritan. He has a new identity, that of a leper. When you have leprosy, little else matters.

It must be late in November when this account takes place because, for these lepers, Thanksgiving Day has arrived. It arrives with the coming of Jesus. "*Master,*" they call Him. A title of respect. They have heard of Him. He is the one who heals. Together they cry out, and Jesus responds to their plea. "*Go and show yourselves to the priests,*" He tells them. And off they go. They act in obedience to His command. They act in faith. Not seeing, not yet, but believing the word Jesus gives them. And on the way they are cleansed.

Now if there were other people standing around watching this scene unfold, and surely there were, they might think that only one of these lepers was healed because only the one, the lone Samaritan, comes back.

But Jesus knows better. "*Were not ten cleansed?*" He asks, "*Where are the nine?*" He is disappointed, isn't He? He knows that all ten received healing for their fatal disease. How is it even possible, therefore, that only one of the ten is thankful?

Ah, but we know better. All ten are thankful. It's just that nine of them express their thankfulness the American way. Rather than entering the presence of Jesus in His house to render thanks to Him, they enthusiastically make use of whatever blessings they have received.

It's not that the nine had turkeys to prepare and football games to watch. But they did have families to enjoy. More important than returning to Jesus, they sped off to return to their families. It had been some time since they had seen their loved ones. And how overjoyed their families would be to receive these lepers back without their leprosy.

Thanksgiving Day, after all, is all about family. Getting together with loved ones, eating a meal together, enjoying each other's company, playing games, relaxing, and whatever else families do to make full use of their blessings. That is the American way of showing thanks.

But it's not the Christian way. For Christians, everything in life revolves not around family, but around Jesus. And the one leper knew this. He had a family, too. He surely loved and missed his family. But his leprosy had changed him. Not just the cleansing of his leprosy. That, too, was life changing. But leprosy itself, being a leper made him pause and consider. He was unclean in his flesh. Leprosy does that. And was not this a stark reminder to him that his heart, also, was unclean? Unclean before God?

Yet, Jesus made him clean. And not just his flesh. The removal of his leprosy was a powerful sign that he was clean through and through. He returns to Jesus who had cleansed him, and he falls down at His feet to worship his God.

The American way of giving thanks is enjoying the blessings of this life. The Christian way of giving thanks is that, too, but much more. Thanking God for the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Blessings that carry us through this life to the life to come.

The American way of giving thanks takes place once a year. But the Christian way of giving thanks is every day. Because every day you have a gracious God. Every day you are able to return to your baptism, your baptism into Jesus Christ, and believe the wonderful truth that you are clean, cleansed through and through in the waters of Holy Baptism.

Jesus, you see, took your uncleanness. He took the leprosy of these lepers and made it His own. But not just their leprosy. He took the uncleanness of their hearts. And yours, too. He covered Himself with your uncleanness, your sinfulness. And He went to the cross to die there as a leper, an unclean leper covered with the leprosy of your sin.

And so, God declares you clean, forgiven. All of you, because Jesus took the uncleanness from all of you. Have you put family ahead of Jesus? He forgives you for this. He forgives all of you for this.

And this is reason to give thanks the Christian way. To gather, with family, around Jesus and thank Him for all His blessings. The blessings for this life, yes, and especially for the forgiveness of your sins, and the life and salvation you have in Jesus. Happy Thanksgiving!