

Luke 17:11-19

I doubt if our Gospel narrative took place on the 4th Thursday in November. Nonetheless, that day when these ten lepers were cleansed became a day of thanksgiving for them and their families. Nine of them rushed home to watch the Lions or the Packers on TV. Only one of the lepers went to church. “*Where are the other nine?*” asked Jesus. Were they not thankful? Of course they were. Who would not be thankful for a new lease on life? But having a thankful heart is not the same as having a heart of faith. The Samaritan leper had faith. Jesus says so. “*Your faith has saved you.*”

What is faith? Faith is nothing other than being given to. This is why infants have faith in Baptism. Because in Baptism they are given to. They are not doers; they are receivers; receivers of God’s grace, of salvation in Christ; they are given Jesus and His righteousness.

All ten lepers were given to. They were given healing for their leprosy. All ten, therefore, had faith. But not all ten had saving faith. Nine of the lepers had faith that Jesus could cure their disease. They were given an earthly blessing; a gift for their physical body.

Everyone has this faith. When we’re sick, we take medicine or we see the doctor. We receive help for our body. Christians or not, help is given. The body is healed. These blessings for the body God gives to all creatures. These gifts are for the world.

But saving faith is not in the world. It’s in the church. God gives to the soul only through His Word and Sacraments. We do not enter into Jesus’ church for physical health for our body. We come for our soul’s salvation; for the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of eternal life.

Isn’t that why the Samaritan leper returned to Jesus? The outward blessing for his body was, for him, a sign. “If Jesus can give to me such a physical cure, He can also give to my soul the greater cure!” And he returned to worship his Lord. “*Go your way,*” Jesus told him, “*your faith has saved you.*”

Thanksgiving Day, for most Americans, is a day to be thankful for our physical blessings. As Christians, we join in with all Americans in this. We are grateful to God for every good gift for our bodies. That’s why we cram 3,000 calories into our mouths in one meal. It’s the American way of giving thanks.

But here tonight is the Christian way of giving thanks. The blessings we receive for our bodies are a sign. “If God can bless me with so many good gifts in this earthly life, He can also bless me with the greater gifts for my soul.” And so we come, like the Samaritan leper did, and we fall down before our Lord to worship.

And in worship, we are given to. We are receivers. Tomorrow we cram food into our mouths. Tonight God crams the Bread of Life into our ears. He fills us with eternal blessings. He sends His Holy Spirit to work through the words we hear in worship to give us the greater gifts for our soul.

These are the gifts Jesus won for you by His death on a cross and His resurrection. These are the gifts that are yours forever, sealed by your Baptism, and neither sickness or poverty, tribulation or death, can take these gifts away from you.

That Samaritan leper was blessed with the cure for his disease. But that blessing was limited because his body would die one day. However, the blessings Jesus gave for his soul would last forever.

Which blessings do we appreciate more? Judging by how little time we spend with God's Word, the Bread of Life for our soul, and how much we enjoy food for our bellies, we have our priorities mixed up. But every earthly blessing is limited. They will come to an end. And they are signs, pointing us to the greater blessings in Christ.

Tonight you understand. You are the leper who returned to Jesus. This is not to your credit. This is by His grace. He has drawn you here. He desires to give you such great gifts that we cannot fully comprehend them.

Here tonight He gives you the gifts of the cross. Your sins are forgiven. Even your sin of mixing up your priorities; it's forgiven. You don't have to get it right for God to forgive you. He forgives you freely for Christ's sake.

And because He forgives you, you live with a grateful heart. You thank Him for all His gifts; gifts which are only for this life, and those greater gifts which last forever. And so you, my friend, one who is given to, will have a blessed Thanksgiving. Amen.