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“Go show yourselves to the priests” (Luke 17:14).

## **Thanksgiving Day**

*Sirach 50:22-24; 1 Cor 1:3-9; Luke 17:11-19*

The Lectionary bows the American holiday of Thanksgiving by offering some of its scriptural treasures on the importance of gratitude. The familiar Gospel story of Jesus and the 10 lepers provides preachers a ready theme of thankfulness. It is a rich layered text whose setting in Luke’s Gospel also provides several other points of departure for us in prayer and our celebration.

The tenth leper, the one who returned to thank Jesus, was a Samaritan. Normally segregated for theological and historical reasons, the 10 lepers nevertheless found solidarity in their common illness and banishment from their communities and families. Prejudice receded in their shared crisis of suffering. The poor Samaritan was equal to his Jewish brothers as an outcast.

When the group cried out to Jesus from a distance, he offered no words of healing, but instead sent all of them, including the Samaritan, to the priests for judgment that they were clean and free to return to their villages. The context of Jesus’ direction was both legally appropriate but also a message to the local clergy and the

inquisitors sent from Jerusalem to investigate Jesus' orthodoxy. If they were questioning the validity of his ministry, here was proof that God was at work through him. Cleansing 10 lepers was no small fete, so they ought to be satisfied.

But, of course, they were not and would continue to harass Jesus until he was himself an outcast, a leper to the temple establishment, the scribes and Pharisees for publicly contaminating himself among lepers, tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners. Jesus was a threat to their legalism and control of the lucrative business of religious observance, rules and rituals imposed on the people by the clergy.

When salvation — both physical healing and spiritual liberation by mercy —leapfrogs over Jewish privilege to heal a Samaritan, this, too, was one of Luke's reasons for including the story in his Gospel. Jesus brought God to everyone, even lepers, Samaritan lepers, and to public sinners and a pagan woman at the border, and to Roman centurions. Universal salvation made everyone part of God's "Chosen People."

A living Word brings this story to us today as a spur to open our tables to strangers and outcasts. It also resonates for the victims of clergy abuse and episcopal neglect in the church. "Go show yourselves to the priests," Jesus says. "Show them that it is God who heals and that I am sending them to you to remind you that mercy, not legal settlement or monetary compensation, is the only path to truth and reconciliation for a wounded church.

If this can happen and be a cause for gratitude, then Thanksgiving will come alive for all of us as a time of profound reflection and conversion of heart. God wants to make all of us whole again. Thanks be to God.

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