Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“Jesus, Master, have pity on us” (Luke 17:12).

Thanksgiving Day (USA).

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

The Gospel for Thanksgiving reminds us each year to be grateful by retelling the story of the 10 lepers who sought healing from Jesus, but only one, a Samaritan, returned to thank him. For most of us fortunate to live in the United States, relative abundance makes it easy to feel grateful. Even in the midst of a continuing pandemic, many families will travel and gather to celebrate the holiday, confident of a full meal and relative safety if they are vaccinated and practice common sense precautions.

The story of the lepers is a timely reminder to be grateful, but the international news between football games and parades on TV will also give us a stark view of what it is like to be among the millions of modern-day “lepers” fleeing violence and turmoil, like the desperate refugees waiting in the freezing cold on the border of Poland, lured there as pawns by the Belarus government to force the European Union to accept them.

Trace your finger on a globe to find millions of migrants in so many places, caught in civil wars, waiting in overflowing internment camps or drowning while trying to cross from Africa to Italy, France to Great Britain, or stalled out and harried by drug gangs in northern Mexico as they wait for processing as asylum seekers in the United

States. These are today’s lepers, men, women and children seen as contagion to national security, threats to jobs and public health, declared untouchable and too alien to claim empathy as fellow human beings.

These “lepers” intrude on our Thanksgiving, their faces so familiar they might have their own cable channel to snare our attention with slick donor appeals, adoption offers and credit-card charity to keep them at bay while we shop for bargains, surf the cop dramas, super hero fantasies and reruns of favorite TV series. Life on its own terms is already overwhelming enough, so who can blame us for escaping to give it a rest?

Jesus does not engage the 10 lepers for long. He is on his way to Jerusalem, so he simply returns their cries with instructions to go show themselves to the priests, then go home to their families. It is only when the one leper returns that he lets him come close enough to fall to the ground at his feet, blubbering his thanks for healing his putrid flesh and broken dignity. He is no longer just another dirty beggar, an untouchable wretch, a dangerous alien, even a sinner marked by God’s displeasure. He is a human being worthy of compassion and welcome. Jesus sees his faith and knows that he is not only healed but saved. Every day from now on will be Thanksgiving for this former leper.

When we can see what Jesus saw, there will be far fewer refugees in our world. We must pray and work for the Beloved Community, where all are welcome, bringing untold blessings to those willing to open their hearts just wide enough to bring them in from the cold.

Happy Thanksgiving.

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