Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“Stand up and go; your faith has saved you” (Luke 17:19).

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

Thanksgiving

The older I get and the more I see how things work and what makes for a happy life, the more I appreciate the simple truth that I am defined by a network of relationships. Not only is it not good for someone to be alone, it is essential for people to be part of some kind of community. We are relational to the core. Created in the image and likeness of God, we are fulfilled only in community, even as we believe that God is not solitary but a community -- a Trinity of Persons united in love. Whether it is a church or a good workplace or a bar where everybody knows your name, we need each other to become ourselves.

The healing of the lepers in today’s familiar Gospel for Thanksgiving is both physical and social. They are cleansed of a debilitating skin disorder, but also restored to their respective communities -- their families, neighborhoods, worshiping communities — to all the essential intimacies that made them who they were.

One of the deepest sufferings inflicted on people is to assign them to groups labeled by some external characteristic: You are an elderly person, you are a sick person, you are an illegal alien, you are this or that racial type, you are a gay man or a transgender woman, you are an atheist, a divorced person, an ex-convict, or a Bible-thumping evangelical. This typecasting reduces people to stereotypical categories, but also screens out the complex and multi-gifted diversity and depth that enriches us.

The Samaritan leper was doubly branded as despised and shunned. His encounter with Jesus restored his health and freed him to go home to his people and his defining communities. But he realized that something even deeper had happened for him in meeting Jesus. He was intimately connected to the deepest expression of humanity possible, a person who had gathered everyone, every imaginable condition and suffering into himself. Jesus was carrying everyone he had ever met toward transformation in the mystery of the cross and the promise of resurrection and eternal life. Faith opens us to that same mysterious inclusiveness in Jesus, puts us in direct, intimate touch with God. It shows us the way home to who we really are, all together, in God and in love.

This story prepares us to celebrate Thanksgiving by reflecting on the gift of life and all the communities that have formed us. It invites us to gather with family, to resolve differences, listen to and accept one another within the circle of love that created us. May the meals we share today remind us of the Eucharist, a Greek word that means “Thanksgiving” and calls us to reconciliation. Just for today, let there be no lepers, aliens or outcasts.

Happy Thanksgiving.