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Passionate gratitude

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez | Oct. 12, 2013 Spiritual Reflections

In today's first reading from 2 Kings, we are told of the healing of Naaman, a Syrian commander in the army of his king, Benhadad II. In the Gospel we become acquainted with the uniquely Lucan narrative of the 10 lepers. All were healed, but only one returned to Jesus to offer worship and thanksgiving.

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Kings 5:14-17
Psalm 98
2 Timothy 2:8-13
Luke 17:11-19

What did Naaman and the healed Samaritan leper have in common? Not only were both healed; both were also transformed by the experience. Naaman came to believe in the God of Elisha, and from then on would worship no other God. The grateful Samaritan -- who was doubly doomed in the eyes of the Jews, first by his leprosy and then by the fact that he was a Samaritan -- chose not to obey Jesus and did not go show himself to the priests. Rather, he returned to Jesus, glorified God and thanked him. For this, he was assured that his faith had saved him. As Barbara Brown Taylor has put it, nine behaved like good lepers, good Jews; only one, a double loser, behaved like a man in love (*The Preaching Life*, Cowley Publications, 1993).

Brown Taylor goes on to explain that she herself knows how to obey. She reads her Bible, says her prayers, pays her pledge like a steady, law-abiding disciple. After all, such behaviors have kept the great ship of the church afloat for more than two millennia. But, says Brown Taylor, "I do not know how to be in love. I am one of the nine, but I am intrigued by the 10th leper, whose passion is confounding."

Following his heart rather than Jesus' orders, the 10th leper was so driven by the experience of being made whole and free and newly alive that he could not help himself. He was compelled by such passionate love and gratitude that he had to return to the One who had made it so. This is the same love and gratitude that should drive us to return the great feast of thanksgiving that we call Eucharist. Gathered together each week, we hear the words of Jesus that challenge us to be healed of our pride, selfishness, anger, apathy, laziness and deceit. We are reminded to serve the needs of others, particularly the poor among us. We eat the bread of life that nourishes us and heals our brokenness. Then we are sent out into the rest of the week to witness to all that we have known in Jesus. We work, we serve, we pray, we love, we remember and give thanks for all God's gifts until we are drawn yet again to give thanks at Eucharist.

If someone were to ask you what causes you to come back every week and celebrate the Eucharist, how would you answer? Would you say you come regularly because the church obliges you? Or is it the command to keep

holy the Sabbath? Some may respond that they want to offer a good example to their children. Others may say that it has become a habit.

Still others look upon their weekly worship as an expression of faith, a spiritual oasis, a place to fuel up for the week ahead. For many of us, the words of Vatican II come quickly to mind: "The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed and the fount from which all its power flows. For the goal of apostolic endeavor is that all who are made sons and daughters of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of the Church, to take part in the sacrifice and eat the Lord's Supper" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Dec. 4, 1963). We have heard these words for almost 50 years and they still ring true with every repetition.

Why do we keep coming back week after week to celebrate the sacred mysteries? How could we stay away? Like Naaman and the 10th grateful leper, we have the opportunity at every eucharistic encounter to be transformed by God and by grace. We are challenged not just to pray, pay and obey, but to be so in love with Jesus and so passionate about the Gospel that we cannot help but glorify God, fall at Jesus' feet and thank him. This is what keeps bringing us back to the One who never stops giving: loving, passionate gratitude. And each time we return, Jesus will assure us, "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."

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