

October 13, 2013 Giving Thanks Homily:

Dear brothers and sisters, in his reflections on today's Gospel reading (Lk.17:11-19) the recently retired Pope Benedict wrote: "What a treasure is hidden in two small words...Thank You!"

Indeed! On one occasion years ago, Mother Teresa of Calcutta told an unforgettable story of a woman who taught her a much needed lesson. One evening she and a group of her sisters picked up four people from the dusty streets of Calcutta. One, in particular, was gravely ill and close to death. She told her sisters, "You take care of the other three; I will take care of the one who looks the worst".

Mother Teresa did all that was humanly possible for a suffering woman left to die neglected and without companionship on a street marked with dying people.. She put the dying woman in one of her beds. The anonymous woman was profoundly grateful. Only moments before her death, a beautiful smile appeared on her face. She took hold of Mother's hand and uttered two words in a soft tone of voice: "Thank you!

The dying woman had not cried out "I'm in pain. I am hungry. I am cold". Nor did she bemoan her certain death. Her parting gift to the saintly nun was a grateful heart.

In today's gospel only one of the lepers returned to give thanks to Jesus after having been healed. "He fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked Him" (Lk.17:16). Gratitude pleases Jesus very much. The absence of gratitude leaves him sorrowful and disappointed, "Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" (Lk.17:17) In sacred scripture gratitude is more than a private act of an individual expressing thanks. It is an act that expresses ones faith in God. Surely, gratitude was on display on the night of the Last Supper, when Jesus gave thanks, broke the bread and gave His own Body and Blood as an offering to God. In a private revelation to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, Jesus declared that it is ingratitude that offends him most.

The bishops of the United States have designated October as "Respect Life" month. How tragic that the sacredness of human life, especially pre-born human life, is disregarded in what Pope Francis calls "our throw-away society".

Recently, the quarterback of the New York Jets, an even tempered young man named Geno Smith, was asked by a reporter if, as a child, he ever got excited on Christmas morning upon receiving gifts. "No!" he replied. "But I must confess that waking up every day excites me."

The young quarterback was grateful for his very existence. Life is a most precious gift. Without God we are nothing, merely dust! G. K. Chesterton has written, "Children are grateful when Santa Claus puts in their stockings gifts of toys or sweets. Could I not be grateful to Santa Claus when he puts in my stockings two miraculous legs?"

According to an ancient Jewish legend, when God finished creation, he asked the angels what they thought of it. One of them replied that the world is so vast and so perfect that there was nothing missing...except a voice to offer God that which is owed Him, an expression of gratitude.

In our self-absorbed entitlement culture, we would be wise to ask ourselves if our gift to Our Divine Lord is a grateful Heart. Let us recall the words from the Mass: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

God bless you.