

Eucharisteo To Give Thanks

a sermon preached on the

20th Sunday after Pentecost

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at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

by **Fr David Moore**

parish priest

Lections: 2 Kings 5:1-15; Luke 17:11-19

It's probably helpful to admit at the outset that the business of healing confronts us with more questions than answers. Why did those ten have leprosy? Why them and not others? What about the thousands of others with leprosy who are not healed? Is it a case of them not being in the right place at the right time? How can that be fair? What about all the other diseases and infirmities which don't get a mention in the list of Jesus' healings, and all whose lives continue in suffering? To be honest, there is no equity in the healing game – not then, and not now, as the stream of comment on the health system in the media attests week after week. Why is this person healed? Why does that one continue to suffer? Why is this person and not that one afflicted in the first place? So let's face the fact that there are questions here about suffering and healing which do not have tidy, rational answers.

Having said that, let's also note that today's story is not primarily a story about healing of physical ailments. It's on this matter that we are so prone to distraction, for we are excessively material and rational, as we are readily seduced by spectacle. But the key to today's story is not the healing itself, which is not spectacular at all – “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” Very ordinary! The key is the response. Only one saw that he was healed – how very odd! How could the other nine fail to notice that they were healed?

When I was seven my parents went overseas, and with my three siblings went into boarding school. I suppose my first conscious awareness of noticing what others around me had can be traced to that very long year 1967. I became intensely aware of what other boys received in the mail from their parents and families. As though in the trenches, looking at another man's Red Cross parcel with envy because his had chocolate and woolly socks. What I now realise, with the benefit of hindsight of course, is that my preoccupation with others' Red Cross parcels diminished my capacity to notice to what was in mine. It is this rivalrous fixation on others and what they seem to have which impedes our capacity to see what we ourselves have. Such is the nature of the systemic rivalry and competition in which we are all immersed. St Paul calls this cosmic, or systemic, Sin – with a capital 'S'. 'Sin' is a first century Ancient Near Eastern term, of course, which in modern terms points to the universal psychological mechanism by which some unacknowledged or repressed part of me is projected onto someone else. I fail to attend to what is in me by looking at the other person, who in this way appears to me to be my competitor, my rival. Perhaps the other nine lepers failed to notice that they were healed because they were busy looking at the other fellow who seemed to be their rival?

The real miracle then is that one leper was liberated from rivalry and competitiveness, noticing what he had been given. And noticing, he does the one thing that matters: “He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet, thanking him.”¹ It is no surprise to discover that the Greek word here is exactly the same word the evangelist uses to describe what Jesus does on the night before his arrest and death.² This is the same word which the church has used to describe what the Body of Christ does every time it gathers on the Lord's Day. The word is, of course, **ευχαριστεω** *eucharisteō*, to give thanks, to be thankful. From the same root is the word **χαρις** *charis*, whose range of meaning includes joy, rejoicing, delight, and which in English gives us charisma, charismatic, charity and grace. Rivalry and competition, because based on the repression of what I avoid acknowledging in myself, so focus my attention on the other person that I am rendered incapable of **χαρις** and **ευχαριστεω**. That is the demonic systemic force which grips all of us. Paradoxically, it would seem that's it's the fact of our being foreigners and

¹ Luke 17:16

² Luke 22:19

outsiders to our true Self that becomes the very ground of possibility for seeing and giving thanks.³ Re-integration of the Samaritan, the outsider, the despised and repressed into the community is the miracle. Jesus says to the foreigner: “Having arisen...”⁴ In other words, here is a resurrection encounter.

The symbolic container which for us is the vessel of resurrection is eucharist. This is why the most appropriate word, and the church’s earliest description, to describe what we christians do is ‘eucharist’ – thanks giving. Other words the church has used at different times and places are limited by historical distortions of one kind or another. Appropriate, also, that we call this annual day of renewal of commitment to the Body of Christ ‘thanksgiving’. For here is the heart of today’s celebration – we have noticed what God has done, we have seen that we are being raised up from the grip of rivalry and competitiveness, no longer looking enviously at the other person’s Red cross parcel, that we are being set free from systemic Sin, and thus seeing, we are drawn into the life of thanks-giving, being raised up. Eucharistic life is saving us.⁵

What a tremendous blessing it is to be able to celebrate eucharist with each and every one of you week-by-week - by the grace of the God whose very life is eucharistic. Thanks be to God!

david@stlukesinthecity.org.nz

³ Luke 17:18

⁴ Luke 17:19 The English NRSV translation “get up” unhelpfully masks the Greek word **αναστας** *anastas*, ‘having arisen’.

⁵ Luke 17:19 The English NRSV translation “made you well” unhelpfully masks the Greek word **εσωκεν** *esōken*, ‘has saved you’.