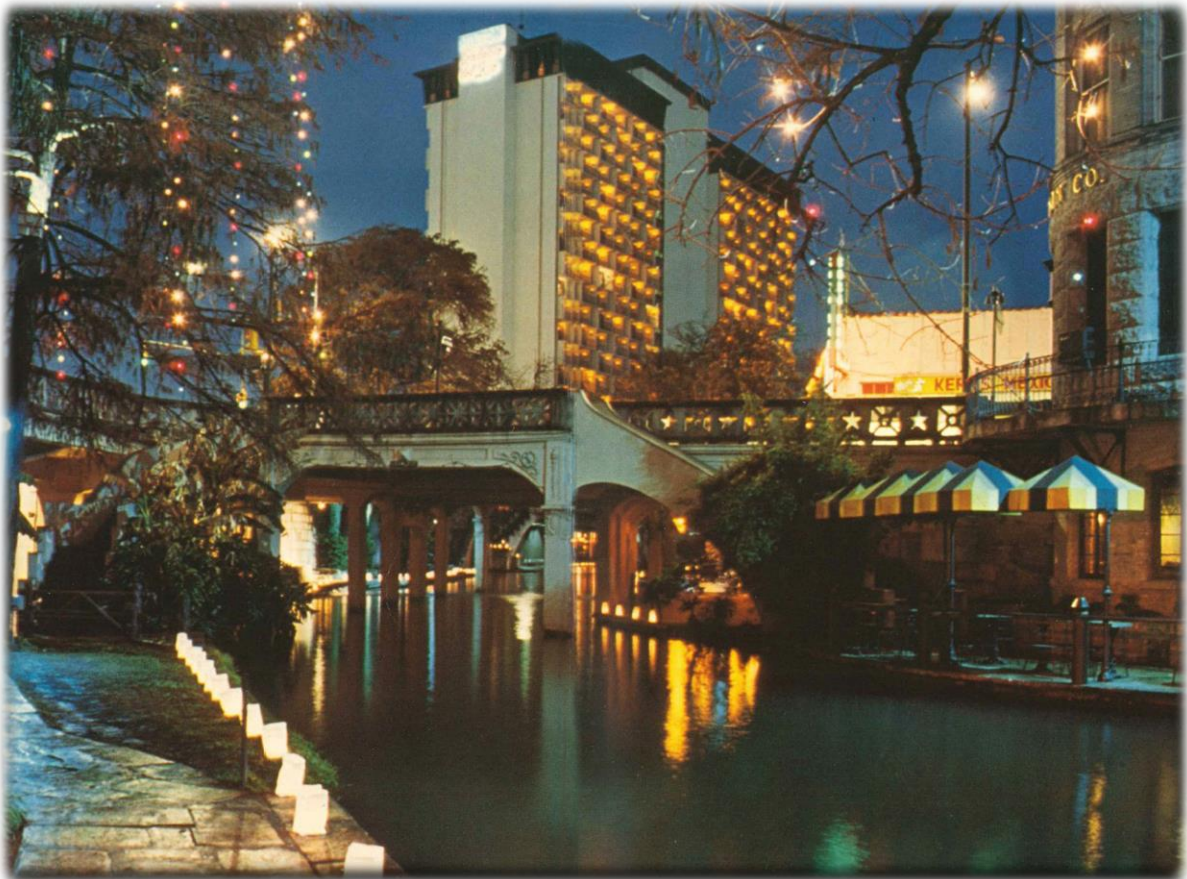


*If in your lifetime the only prayer that you offer is thanks, that would suffice*

## The 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C

2 KGS 5:14-17, PS 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 2 TM 2:8-13, LK 17:11-19



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10/8/2016

Good evening. We hear today the parable of the “Ten Lepers.” In the time of this Gospel, you were declared a leper and an outcast from the community for almost any skin eruption or rash. When anyone approached, the leper was required to call out, “unclean” to avoid the spread of the disease. Isolating the leper was for the health of the community. Surprisingly, even today, medical science still does not understand leprosy’s method of transmission.

Today, medical isolation means a hospital room with visitors being required to wash hands, mask, gown and glove. In the time of Jesus, isolation was perhaps a cave outside the city, separate from friends and family. The leper could not provide for their family and were reduced to begging for food. So, when Jesus heals ‘the ten,’ this was no small gift. Only one returns to offer thanks. This parable is about gratitude for the gifts that we are given.

In the play, Fiddler on the Roof, Tevye goes about his business as a milkman, muttering throughout the day, to himself and God. He speaks with God as a friend and partner. Some of the conversations may be self-serving, questioning why God did not make him a rich man or why his horse is lame, but they flow from an awareness of God. Our awareness of God’s presence leads to our prayerful conversation. This dialogue is seed for transformation and gratitude.

The Samaritan that returned to thank Jesus was an outcast by faith, ethnicity and leprosy. By cultural standards, he would have been an unlikely model of faith, and the least likely to return giving thanks. Despite living outside the Jewish faith, he recognized not only a physical healing but a spiritual one as well. Jesus affirms what has taken place by saying, “Your faith has saved you.” It is good for us to recall that God invites all people to transformation.

As our understanding and awareness of God matures so should our gratitude. As the mystic, Meister Eckhart said, "If in your lifetime the only prayer that you offer is thanks, that would suffice." Gratitude is a natural reaction to what God is doing in our lives. The Samaritan seemed to understand this.

Renata and I were at an outdoor mall recently on a weekday morning. That meant that there were very few people about. There was a young girl, 18 to 24 months, who had really mastered the art of running and she had plenty of room to do so. She would run some distance from her parents laughing and then her father would chase her down and then toss her into the air. Of course, it ended with squeals of delight as he caught her in a bear hug. This went on for some time. The laughter and joy of this child reflected the parental love that she felt. This child knew she was loved, and delighted in it.

In a world of political turmoil and war, with nations seeking to establish new military footholds, with a convoluted election here at home, and with our continued struggle for civil rights, in the clamor of all this, God speaks in the laughter of a child. Thank you Lord for the gift of hearing her voice.

San Antonio, Texas has a river running through the heart of the city. There are restaurants and shops of all kinds lining the river. In the 80's one of these shops was a small art gallery. They had probably no more than 30 or 40 paintings for sale at any one time. One evening, moments before closing, two men in business suits entered introducing themselves to the owner as buyers for a gallery in New York. As they discussed the various paintings one 'buyer' served as a distraction while the other drifted into another part of the gallery.

Out of sight, he used a razor to cut a Norman Rockwell painting from its frame. In seconds, he had the canvas rolled up and tucked in his jacket. He rejoined his partner and they apologized to the owner for keeping him past closing. They left with the promise to return the next day.

The theft was discovered the following morning. The frame hung empty on the wall. In the lower right hand corner of the frame were canvas threads still covered with pigment. The thief had failed to cut all the way through the canvas tearing the corner from this work of art.

The empty frame and the torn canvas threads made for a strong image. Many people, whether by abuse or infirmity, have suffered physical and psychological pain. Often, like the canvas, our innocence is rolled up and snatched away.

We sometimes bring to the Eucharist, the torn threads of our relationships, hanging from what seems like an empty frame. Like the Samaritan, we hope for understanding and to be made whole. Jesus is there to embrace us. We are the child lifted and tossed into the air. With joy, we land in the arms of our Heavenly Father.

Lord, it is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks.

## References

All scripture quotations are taken from;. (1987). *The New American Bible, Revised edition*. USCCB.

Knipper, D. J. (2012). *Hungry and You Fed Me*. Manalapan: Clear Vision Publishing.

**Note:** The cover pictures the San Antonio Riverwalk at night. The story of the art theft is true. I saw the empty frame for myself the day after. Being that I am partial to the work of Norman Rockwell, it was a riveting image.