

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – year C 2007 LK 17:11-19

- 1) I think all of us still remember I like it was yesterday, though now it is six years ago.
 - a) Those fevered weeks after the terrorist attacks on September 11th.
 - b) What do you remember from that time?
 - i) Perhaps you remember the anger I do
 - ii) Perhaps you remember the sadness I still feel it.
 - iii) But one of the things I remember was what happened in churches all over the nation during that time. Suddenly people flooded in, some coming to church for the first time in years.
 - (1) It was astonishing
 - (2) that so many people felt any connection with organized religion at all–
 - (a) let alone felt it so strongly,
 - (3) And yet maybe it was not so astonishing; because along with the anger and the sadness there is something else we all remember – and that is the fear.
 - (a) Fear is what united us during those fevered days.
 - (b) Fear of new attacks to be sure
 - (c) But mostly just fear because we realized just how powerless we really are.
- 2) Of course as the weeks turned into months, and there were no more attacks, our fear faded, and our churches emptied.
 - a) More than one priest wished it could be otherwise,
 - i) But of course it couldn't
 - ii) because fear is notoriously fickle.
- 3) And yet that has not stopped others from learning the lesson of those terrible days;
 - a) And it has not stopped some from putting them into practice
 - i) For we move from level yellow to level orange to level red
 - ii) We hear threats of weapons of mass destruction and the promises of attacks to come
 - iii) We are told that to vote for one candidate rather than another will invite more terrorism, and cause us to lose the war on terror
 - b) Six years later we are constantly reminded that we should be afraid; because fear –
 - i) fear of terrorism,
 - ii) fear of foreigners,
 - iii) fear of failure
 - iv) fear of them is a powerful way to unite people.
 - v) So long as there is a “them” to fear.
- 4) Fear forms the backdrop of the gospel we hear today.
 - a) For it is the reason why those ten lepers must cry out to Jesus for mercy
 - b) And it is what makes it so astonishing
 - i) That Jesus would approach them and talk to them
- 5) Because you see, Leprosy for us is a disfiguring skin disease, which is curable with antibiotics.
- 6) In Jesus' day, however, leprosy was any disfiguring skin disease curable or not. The priests made the determination as to whether the disease was leprosy, and if so, that person was excluded from the community;
 - a) People could not touch them,

- b) people could not communicate with them
- c) the lepers had to warn anyone who even approached them
 - i) that they were unclean.
- 7) In fact that is probably what this group of lepers was really doing when they encountered Jesus , crying out for mercy; but knowing full well that Jesus could really do nothing for them
 - a) For then he would be unclean too.
- 8) But then Jesus tells them to go and show themselves to the priests;
 - i) Strangely, they all respond
 - ii) strangely, while on the way they are all healed,
 - iii) and even more strangely, at that moment one of them returns
 - iv) and shows himself, not to the priests but to Jesus himself,
 - (1) throwing himself at his feet and thanking God.
- 9) It is at this moment we discover that this former leper has dirty little secret;
 - a) He is a Samaritan; a member of a community of people descended from tribes of Israel destroyed centuries before by the Assyrians
 - i) The Samaritans had their own laws, their own temple on Mount Gerazim, and their own way of worshiping the God of Israel.
 - ii) As a result the people of Israel looked on them as little better than lepers; and treated them in the same way;
 - (1) They could not touch them
 - (2) Could not communicate with them
 - (3) Were not supposed to even approach them because if they united with this unclean people; then they would be unclean too.
- 10) At this moment we see the reason why the newly cleansed leper had to separate himself from the others; why he could NOT go to the priest, though the others could;
- 11) It would not matter even if he were cured
 - a) As far as the priest were concerned he would always be feared, because he was an unclean Samaritan
 - b) But not as far as Jesus was concerned
 - i) And thus neither as far as God was concerned.
 - (1) For Jesus not only cures this Samaritan,
 - (2) But holds him up as an example
 - (a) Precisely because as the moment when his healing separated him from the people of Israel as a Samaritan,
 - (i) And made him afraid to approach the priests
 - (b) He knew he was not separated from God, and thus was not afraid to return and give thanks to the one who came first to him
 - (i) the God who had healed him
- 12) Fear is a powerful way to bring people together
 - a) We have seen how it is used by governments,
 - b) We know how it is used by religious communities
 - c) We experience its use daily in families and friendships, clubs cliques and groups
 - d) All of them finding their unity with one another

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- i) By fostering fear of “them”
 - (1) Whoever, and whatever “they” are.
- 13) But Jesus offers another way to bring people together – a way that is not based on fear, but on faith.
- 14) The faith that those lepers had, which caused them to cry out to Jesus
- 15) The faith that the Samaritan had, which caused him to return and give thanks;
- 16) The faith that Jesus had that God welcomes all of us to come and be healed of the fear which disfigure the face of our nation our church and our communities far worse than any case of leprosy.
- 17) This morning we gather in this church to celebrate our patron Saint, Teresa of Avila.
 - a) Take a look around: what do you see?
 - b) I see people of so many different races, nations languages and way of life.
 - c) I see people who are feared by many in our nation
 - d) I see people who are excluded by many in our church
 - e) I see people who yearn to find somewhere they belong
 - f) I see all of us here, coming to give thanks to God, like that leper did,
 - i) Only we give thanks to God for St. Teresa’s.
 - (1) That place where all are welcome to come, to be forgiven, to be reconciled with God and with one another.
 - (2) Because in this community we are not made ugly by our fear.
 - (3) In this community we are made beautiful by our diversity.
 - (4) And in a world such as ours that is a reason to give thanks.