



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year C-October 9<sup>th</sup> 2022

***Readings: 2 Kings 5: 14-17, Psalm 97, 2 Timothy 2: 8-13,***

***Luke 17: 11-19***

There is an old army saying, 'There are no atheists in a foxhole.'

Put another way, the famous Irish writer, Brendan Behan, was asked if it was true that he was an atheist – a rare category in the Ireland of his day. Behan replied simply, 'Well I'm what you might call a day time atheist.' leaving the listener to reflect on the artist's human reaction to the gathering dark.

The reality is that even the most devout among us find a new intensity in our prayers when trouble looms or disaster strikes. Our prayer passion intensifies as the potential consequences magnify. It is a very human and childlike response. We get a powerful glimpse of this in the bloody sweat of the Agony in the Garden where Christ prays to the Father in the shadow of the suffering of Calvary.

What is less certain is the subsequent response to God when our prayers are answered. Today's Gospel story of the Ten Lepers illustrates it very nicely. Victims of a degenerative, mutilating, debilitating disease which carries with it the pain of social ostracism and exile from the community,

these desperate sufferers turn to Jesus. They cry out to Him for help.  
'Have mercy on us'.

AND.....He does not heal them! Watch closely. Jesus tells them to go and show themselves to the priests. Only the priest could verify a cure and re-admit the stricken soul to the community. So Jesus is asking them to set out in faith ....as if their prayer were answered. And, in so doing, in obedience to Christ and with faith in His word of power, the wretched of the earth turn homewards in hope.

As they go, Luke tells us, they were cleansed. This is more than a hygienic reflection. 'Cleansed' means not only washed clean but healed, restored, forgiven – as the great hymn says – brought back into communion with the whole community. Jesus has quite literally given them back their lives. And one man returns to glorify God . More of him in a moment. What we might notice, as we skim through our Greek New Testament, is a certain familiarity, a pattern which resonates. The word the lepers use to implore Jesus is 'Eleison'. It is the very word we use ourselves in the penitential rite in the liturgy of the Mass. We, the unclean, exiled and alienated by sin from the communion, seeking restoration, healing and renewal sing with passion, KYRIE ELEISON, CHRISTE ELEISON, KYRIE ELEISON. It is why we keep our ears and hearts attuned to the ancient language of our forefathers in continuity and solidarity with those who have gone before us on the pilgrim way and now rejoice in a greater light and on a farther shore, whose prayers cheer us on our way. The Gospel then tells us that, as we go in Faith, we are cleansed – the Greek word is Catharsis, the cleansing, the purifying power of God makes us fit for the Presence by mending the damage, reactivating the spiritual senses which have been numbed by the disease and dis-order of sin, welcoming us home. This is the absolution of

the Sacrament of Reconciliation, advertised by the intention of the priest in the response, 'May Almighty God have mercy on us..' And the response? The tenth leper 'Returns to GLORIFY God'. Surprise , surprise, the very next item on the liturgical agenda of the Mass is the Gloria. This great 3rd Century hymn is a whoop of joy for the mercy of God and the possibility and promise of that long journey's healing which transforms us, by faith and obedience, into a people fit for the community of saints dwelling in the Presence eternally. Aren't you glad you have the Mass?

To conclude with the tenth leper. 'Where are the other nine?' Jesus asks. Good question. Ten per cent seems like a poor return.

You may, like me, reflect on how passionate our prayer is when we desperately want something and how brief and often perfunctory our thanksgiving is when we get it, if we pause to give thanks at all. Here again the Mass comes to our aid. Because, at the heart of the Mass is the Eucharistic Prayer- which is to say the Prayer of Thanksgiving. 'Let us give thanks to the Lord our God', the priest sings and we respond: 'It is right and just'. Thanksgiving is the natural response to mercy. It educates the human heart in the journey of the soul towards God. Thanksgiving opens us to the possibility of new life. Thanksgiving alerts us to the deeper realities in our relationships with the Eternal and with one another. Gratitude to God makes us generous to one another. It is the root of love. Once we understand the pattern of the Mass, the heart of worship, we not only begin to comprehend but to experience the healing power of Jesus, the washing away of the debilitating corruption of sin and the new life beckoning us into the Communion of Saints and the Community of forever.

Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison, Kyrie Eleison..... Gloria in excelsis Deo It is truly right, it is our Duty and our Salvation always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, Holy Father, Almighty and eternal God, through Christ Our Lord. 'Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, Who, like me, His praise should sing..'

Only one in ten returned to thank Jesus for giving him back his life. Let's make sure that we are in the ten per cent