

28th Sunday, 07

The scripture scholar Daniel Harrington tells us that the Hebrew word for thanks, *bodah*, means “to confess, profess or state publicly” that at this particular moment God was at work. How true that is. Something turns out extraordinarily well in our lives, and much to our surprise, and we stop and think: this was not my doing. This was God at work in my life. And so we *bodah*, we stop to give thanks that God has acted here and now for me.

In last week’s Gospel Jesus told us that after we have done all that we should do in our relationship with God, we should simply say that we are sinners and have done what we should have done, our duty. This translates to mean that God does not owe us any thank-you when we obey him. We are simply doing what we should do, for He is God and we are his servants. But the opposite is not true: God does not owe us a thank-you, but we owe Him one, for we are his servants, indeed, his creatures.

In human relationships a thank-you can be so healing and such a sign of respect and acknowledgement. You know how it is when you do something for someone, and the someone does not even acknowledge what you have done for him or her. Children, you

know, have to be taught to say thank-you. Young people have to be taught to acknowledge a birthday gift with a thank-you. We older folks sometimes forget this lesson we learned so young. That is sad. What lack of awareness or even arrogance can be present in us when we don't even bother to thank those who are good to us, who do us favors. It says one thing: we don't appreciate the gift and the giver.

And does such an attitude have anything to do with our faith? Of course it does. Christianity is one long thank-you to God for his gifts to us: creation first of all (the simple gift of our lives) and redemption (our being called in Jesus to be the adopted children of God). Our major prayer is an act of thanksgiving. That is what the word eucharist means.

If we attend the Eucharist every Sunday, how is it that this act of thanksgiving to God does not become our basic attitude not only towards God but towards all others who are his gifts to us?

Sometimes it is the stranger who knows enough to say thank-you. In our first reading today the leper healed is the general of a foreign king, a non-Jew. But he learns to his surprise that it is the God of Israel who can heal his leprosy. He is so grateful that he

offers the prophet Elisha a gift and now becomes a worshipper of the God of Israel, believing that if he is to do that, he must get dirt from Israel upon which he can offer a sacrifice. In today's Gospel it is the Samaritan, the half-Jew whom full-blooded Jews refused to accept, who returns to give thanks. Is there a lesson in this for us? What would it be? That we learn that our God deals with all people and not just with ourselves, and that at times there is greater faith and thankfulness in those whom we tend to look down on because they are different from ourselves than there is among ourselves. So often that is what the Gospels tell us, that Jesus found more acceptance among foreigners, greater faith among them, than he found among his own people. Perhaps the greatest example of this is the Syrophenician woman who was pestering him for a cure for her daughter possessed by an evil spirit. You remember what happened. Jesus told her it was not right to take the food of the children, the Jews, and give it to the dogs. Her answer changed his mind: "Lord, even the dogs under the table eat the childrens' scraps." Her daughter was healed.