

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Thanksgiving Day
November 26, 2020

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Several weeks before Thanksgiving Day, a daily Mass gospel tells of the healing of the ten lepers. (You remember the incident because it occasionally occurs as a Sunday Mass gospel.) Only one of the healed lepers returned to give thanks. It is an important part of the message not to demonize the other nine men. They were not bad men. In fact they were quite respectable in a remarkable way. The crucial difference is they did not return to give thanks. In most Christian prayer books this nine-out-of-ten ratio is reflected in the number of pages devoted to intercessory prayer and prayers of thanksgiving: *nine* pages of prayers which ask for something, to *one* page of thanksgiving for what has been given.

All ten lepers were told by Jesus to go to the priest and obtain a certificate of cleanness. This instruction was given even *before* it was apparent they were being cured. Yet not a single one of them said: “That’s not good enough, Jesus. Cure us *first*, and then we’ll go.” To their great credit they went, simply on the authority of the Lord.

When it became apparent they had been cured along the way, the nine continued to do what Jesus had instructed: they went to the priest for the certificate of cleanness. This makes perfect sense. For after witnessing the miracle cure of their disease, these men were *all the more respectful* of Christ’s directions. It was all eminently reasonable. Still, these nine did not return to give thanks.

All ten men were made clean. Nine of these men received all they ever hoped for. But one got that and more. He was made *whole*. This was because he came back to give thanks. The Greek word ὀγιής “**made whole**” is also sometimes translated “**saved**.” If you are saved, it is that you are made whole: in body, mind, and spirit, *the whole nature of man*.

What was so important about returning to give thanks? The healthy, secure, and prosperous life is not complete if it lacks wholeness. The lack may be of charity and compassion, or lack of a concern for justice and fair play. In the case of the nine men made physically healthy, the lack was in gratitude, wonder, humility, and the knowledge of God. During this terrible pandemic, many lives right now are

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neither healthy, secure, or prosperous. But lives centered upon the Lord in thanksgiving still experience wholeness even in anxiety, danger, and poverty.

As a result of his healing, one man now had Jesus Christ at the center of his life. This happened because he had returned to give thanks. And where Christ is at the center, a soul is open to the cultivation of all those other virtues: charity and justice, and all wholesome and godly attributes. Many lives are physically healthy and civically respectable. These people pay their taxes and rake up the leaves in their yards. But lives can never be whole until they find their need for God and then orient their lives on Him and give thanks. When that happens, Almighty God, Who is never outdone in generosity, fills in with His grace whatever is lacking in us.