

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE,  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES  
THANKSGIVING DAY  
LITTLE FLOWER CHURCH, BETHESDA, MARYLAND  
NOVEMBER 28, 2019**

I want to wish you a very Happy Thanksgiving! I am particularly grateful to Msgr. Vaghi for his hospitality, allowing me to continue this traditional visit of the Apostolic Nuncio to your parish on Thanksgiving Day. As the personal representative of the Holy Father, I want to assure you of his spiritual closeness and paternally affection as you gather with family and friends to give thanks to God.

In his visit to the United States in 2015, Pope Francis, addressing the American bishops, said:

“My first word to you is one of thanksgiving to God for the power of the Gospel which has brought about remarkable growth of Christ’s Church in these lands and enabled its generous contribution, past and present, to American society and to the world. I thank you for your generous solidarity with the Apostolic See and the support you give to the spread of the Gospel in many suffering areas of our world. I appreciate the unfailing commitment of the Church in America to the cause of life and that of the family ...”  
(Address of His Holiness to the Bishops of the United States, 23 September 2015)

We have gathered as children of the one God and Father of us all to give thanks for the many blessings we have received. Truly this country has been blessed with abundance, not only with natural resources and material blessing, but also with freedom - including the freedom to worship God and render Him thanks. Each year on Thanksgiving Day, we hear St. Luke’s Gospel – the story of the healing of the ten lepers. One of them, a Samaritan, comes back to give thanks to God, praising him and glorifying him, and for his faith, he was saved.

The Gospel concludes with the words, *“Your faith has saved you.”* This is the culmination of a journey of faith. Lepers were forced to live at the peripheries of society. Excluded from work, temple worship, and family life, they lived in poverty and loneliness. Amid this isolation and exclusion, they had only one certainty: a miserable death. Although the lepers approached Jesus, they still kept their distance, as they called out to Him. They cried out to God for mercy – for compassion, for pity – and He heard them. Though they kept their distance, Jesus did not stay far from them. He drew near to them, just as God draws near to us, even when we fall into sin – a form of spiritual leprosy. God is eager to heal and save us.

If crying out for help is the first stage in their journey, the second stage is humility. We need to be humble not only to ask for healing but also humble in order to receive healing from God. This posture of humble receptivity involves letting go of our insecurities and fears, our addictions, and our worldly attachments; it means emptying ourselves to be in a position to be filled with the good things the Lord has prepared.

The third stage on the journey is walking. The lepers, in obedience to Jesus, began their journey to Jerusalem. Along the way, they were healed. They were not simply healed, while standing in front of Jesus. This too is like our journey of life. Many things – both joyful and sorrowful – occur along the way. During the course of our life and our work, we meet new people and have new experiences. How many

people have we met along life's journey for whom we give thanks today?! How many have been real blessings in our lives?!! Even when we experience loss or tragedy or someone who challenges us, we still learn from the experience and have an opportunity to grow or to forgive.

When we journey in faith, it is often a slow journey in which we must put one foot in front of the other. It can be grueling. It is not always a sprint. Sometimes we lose our way or have to walk uphill, but asking for the grace of perseverance, we advance. The Holy Father says:

“Faith advances when we make our way with trust in God. Faith advances with humble practical steps, like the steps of the lepers ... The same is true for us. We advance in faith by showing humble and practical love, exercising patience each day, and praying constantly to Jesus as we keep pressing forward.” (Pope Francis, Homily, XXV Sunday in Ordinary Time, 13 October 2019)

After crying out in humility and walking, the lepers are healed, but only one, a Samaritan, truly completes the journey. The others may have shown themselves to the priests, but the Samaritan returned to Jesus to give thanks. It was only the Samaritan, the one who was most despised, who returned, glorifying God and through Himself at the feet of the Redeemer, giving thanks to God. The other nine perhaps were focused only on the gift they had received – their health – and not on the Giver of the gift.

Jesus seeing the actions of the tenth leper and hearing his words of gratitude, said, “*Stand up and go; your faith has saved you.*” Ten were healed, but of the ten, how many were saved? Jesus brings us salvation, which is more than physical healing. There is a difference between healing and salvation.

Recall that when Jesus encountered the lepers, he was journeying toward Jerusalem. He is headed to Jerusalem to give His life as a ransom for the many upon the altar of the Cross. It is this sacrifice of Calvary which we offer at each Mass. The word Eucharist means Thanksgiving. Of all the blessings that we have received from God, none is greater than the gift of His Son whom we receive in Holy Communion and who offers us forgiveness of our sins, healing inside and out. Is it any wonder that we conclude each Mass with the words, “Thanks be to God”?

Let us take a few moments to be silent, to recall the many blessings we have received, especially during the past year, and to give thanks to God. May we show our gratitude as the leper did – by praising God and glorifying Him, not merely with our lips but with our very lives.