

My vacation was great, until it wasn't. Leaving the Netherlands through Schiphol Airport was an exercise in frustration that left me infuriated. That experience was about as bad as it could have been without my missing my flight. I was going to say that experience left me feeling in an unChristian way, but today's Gospel reminded me that Jesus himself was not above feeling, and expressing, frustration. At least, that's what I hear coming through when he says, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" As frustrated people tend to do, Jesus doesn't seem to address this gripe to anyone in particular.

As a quick side note, the Greek word Jesus uses that is translated "foreigner" is not pejorative. Jesus points out the Samaritan's being a member of a different community in order to highlight his wonder that the last person you'd expect to do the right thing did it, when people you would have expected to do right instead let you down. It's like finding a Mormon who can mix a better martini than nine Episcopalians.

Anyway. Christians are often uncomfortable when Jesus says, does, and feels things that conflict with our notions of what we want Jesus to say, do, and feel. We tend to want Jesus to be ever-cheerful, indulgent, and unchallenging, though we'll allow him to thrill us when he's lashing out at people we don't like — blissfully ignoring what those people and we have in common. But moments like these are not only nothing to fear, they should encourage us, because they remind us not only that Jesus was fully human, but also that occasional difficult moments are compatible with a life of grace, mercy, and love.

I think today's Gospel is only superficially a story of physical healing. The miraculous cure receives much less attention than its social, emotional, and behavioral context and consequences. There are so many unusual details here. First of all, St. Luke emphasizes the divide between Jews and Samaritans, this time with a geographical reference. His Greek implies that the village is on the border, such as it was, between Samaria and the Jewish region of Galilee. Not a surprising place for people who have been pushed out of their communities.

Two things are surprising. The sick men are not exactly "outcasts," for they are closely connected to this village, and might even live in it. And as intense as the enmity usually was between Jews and Samaritans, here, their common affliction seems to erase that division, just as in our own time, people with the same disease or disability are typically viewed as unified communities. Tellingly, St. Luke at first describes them as speaking as one voice, and only identifies the returning man as a Samaritan after Jesus heals him.

Today we often talk about community as if it's the most important thing, and it certainly is very important. Yet the sick men readily request Jesus's healing, seemingly eager to give up their community in exchange for individual health. And I would have done the same thing. The returning man shows how we can have both healing and

community.

By prioritizing a relationship with Jesus over everything else, the returning man shows us the way of transcendence, which allows us to receive all the good gifts that God intends for us, including both health and community. And what brings him back to Jesus is powerful, but simple: gratitude. Gratitude erases a cultural and religious boundary and literally brings a recipient of grace back to God. Gratitude also overcomes human divisions and unites us with each other. A grateful church can unite the world; ungrateful churches and Christians sow division.

He may not have known it, but the returning man had not actually disobeyed Jesus's command to show himself to his priest. Jews and Samaritans had their own priests, and people who had recovered from certain diseases, including this one, had to show themselves to their priest before they could be reintegrated into their original community. Jesus might not have been recognized as such during his public ministry, but he was and is indeed a priest, and not for any one group but for the whole world. And we see him exercise his priestly authority to restore relationships by saying, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well." Simply having enough faith to express gratitude transforms this healed individual's life, and not just his life, but the lives of the family and friends to whom Jesus invites him to return.

That same insight turned my attitude around and in a sense, saved my vacation experience. Instead of dwelling on a situation I could not control, I remembered that I had complete control over my attitude. I calmed down and remembered just how much I had to be grateful for. For a week, I got to spend time with family whom I don't get to see as often as I'd like, seeing beautiful places and priceless works of art, eating delicious food while enjoying ready access to masterpieces of Trappist brewing — and my father had paid for pretty much all of this, plus our rental house.

Gratitude doesn't invalidate our other feelings, but it does put them into perspective, and turns our hearts to be both joyful and gracious. And I went from being determined not to spend a single Euro in that miserable airport to being determined to buy some fine chocolates to share with you at coffee hour as a token of my gratitude for the time off.

We at Advent have so much to be grateful for. A loving, welcoming, giving, and most importantly, Christ-centered community; dedicated and generous volunteers; a wonderful music program; a beautiful campus; a preeminent school, our signature ministry, and many other ministries that share the grace and love of God with our neighbors.

Generosity tends to follow gratitude, and indeed, we have all these blessings to be grateful for because our congregation faithfully answers the call to support them with their annual pledging. I am grateful for every gift, every year. To everyone who supports our church with their time and money, I thank you. Soon every family in our parish should receive a letter outlining why this year's pledge drive is particularly important. We

are facing a more challenging financial situation than we have had in recent years, but we also have excellent reason to be hopeful, in part because we have seen some extraordinary generosity this year.

This stewardship drive is our opportunity to put our ministries on a strong, sustainable foundation, and ensure that our mission thrives. In our individual lives and our life as a church, we have so much to be grateful for. Please take a moment to think about how richly you have been blessed, in so many different ways. Consider what it might look like for you to express the same life-changing, relationship-restoring gratitude that the healed Samaritan expressed when he “turned back, praising God with a loud voice... prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him.”