

AM I TRULY GRATEFUL? ALWAYS?

As many of you are aware my sister Barbara who lives in Horsham and often attends Mass here at Saint Anthony's is now at home in a hospice protocol. There is nothing medically that can be done for her any more. Unless there is a miracle the Lord will be calling her to the kingdom of God in the not-too-distant future. But we have not ruled out miracle. Specifically we are praying for the Lord to heal her through the intercession of Father Bill Atkinson, an Augustinian priest who was a quadriplegic from a sledding accident in his seminary days. He was ordained an Augustinian priest and taught at Monsignor Bonner High School for over thirty years. He died maybe ten years ago and the cause for his canonization has been introduced in Rome. He needs two miracles to be canonized. We would be okay if our sister was one of them. And so we pray. I want to thank you, as does she, for all of your prayers on her behalf.

I was visiting with her earlier in the week and bringing her communion. As I sat by her bed she said to me: "Steve, thanks for all the things you have done for me. Thanks for all the times you were there for me. I am grateful." I was not expecting anything like that. I was surprised and humbled and a little awkward. "Thanks Barb, I am grateful to be your brother and that you are my sister!"

Miracles and gratitude. My life right now and the readings for today right now. Gratitude and appreciation. The Syrian general Namaan was a powerful man, a wealthy man. But a man with the disease of leprosy with no known cure then. No doctor could heal him. His own gods did not help him. He was despondent, disillusioned and bitter. Then a young Jewish girl who had been captured in some of the fighting between Syria and Israel and turned into a slave for the general's household said to him that there was a prophet in Israel who could cure his leprosy. He believes her and puts his faith in her. He goes to the King of Syria and asks him to write a letter to the King of Israel to identify the prophet and let the general go to him. The Israelite king does not see that is a straightforward request but a ruse by the Syrian king to pick a fight. Eventually cooler heads prevail and the general with his retinue and caravan of gifts arrives outside the prophet's hermitage.

The prophet doesn't even come out. Instead he tells the messenger to tell the king that he should bathe seven times in the Jordan River. The General is not amused. The prophet was supposed to come out and pray over him and pronounce him cured. Instead he tells him to bathe in the Jordan. The general had seen the Jordan River. Not impressed. There were better and cleaner rivers in Syria. All his hopes came crashing down and he is angry. But again cooler heads prevail and he is talked into doing what the prophet directed him to do. When he does, his skin is healed and

becomes like that of a little child. He is cured in his body but he is cured in his heart and in his soul too. He goes back to the prophet's house to give him all the gifts but the prophet isn't interested. Then the general says that he wants two loads of dirt from Israel. Because the God of this land is the one true God because he alone could heal him. From now on the Syrian general will worship on Israelite soil in his own country but the God of Israel.

We must not miss the fundamental point here. There were all kinds of "gods" in antiquity that people worshiped. They did not believe that all gods were the same. This general comes to realize that the God of Israel is the one true God. That is what we believe. It has become commonplace in many quarters today for people to say that we all worship the same God. That is not so. Not true. The God who is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ is true god and not everyone on this earth believes that. That there is incarnation whereby God takes on our flesh. Not everyone accepts that. Or that Jesus died to save us. Not everyone believes. Or that he has left himself to us under the form of bread and wine. Many do not believe. Only the true God is worthy of the general's thanks and our thanks.

In the gospel a similar story that is very familiar to us. We know that only one returns and he is a Samaritan, A foreigner. But all were cured. I am sure that they were all overjoyed and grateful but only one comes back. So there is a difference between feeling grateful and expressing gratitude, truly being grateful. So the question for me is: How grateful am I? To Christ for all He has done for me? I feel grateful but how often do I express it? Communicate it? Convey it? To the person to whom I am grateful?

How often should we give thanks to God? Express our thanks to God? A couple of times a year? Christmas and Easter? For all He has done? The gift of life. Freedom. Our intellect and mind. Our emotions, our desires, our will. For all the opportunities, the gift of time every day. And grace. And friendships. And our country and our Church and our world? How much time do you spend in gratitude? 24/7. 168 hours in a week. Ten percent? Five percent? Two percent? One percent? One-half of one percent? Do you know that one half of one percent would be a little less than an hour? About the amount of time it takes to celebrate Sunday Mass.

Do you remember Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane asking Peter, James and John to stay awake and pray with him but they fall asleep. "Could you not watch with me for one hour?" Is that not the question Our Lord asks of us? Ungrateful or grateful. Appreciative or unappreciative to the God who loves, heals and offers forgiveness leading to life everlasting. It is Jesus himself who asked his disciples to celebrate Eucharist to remember him. Real gratitude.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.