

The Three E's of Gratitude

Homily for 28th Sunday of Ordinary Time

October 12 – 13, 2019

The Mission Statement of St. Peter's is on the wall as you enter the Narthex. It reads as follows:

“St Peter's is a Rock built on the foundation of Truth inspiring and equipping believers to be a Eucharistic People.”

This Mission statement was arrived at two years ago when the Parish and Finance Councils spent the day together. In it we affirm that like our Patron Saint, Peter we are a rock, something we are reminded of whenever we come on the property. There are rocks everywhere. Rocks remind us of something that has a permanency and presence. Think of this in relation to the beauty of such mountains as Rundle in Banff and Temple in Lake Louise. This rock is built on another Rock, the “foundation of Truth.” Remember that truth are not abstract principles but a person, the Lord Jesus Christ who especially comes to us in the Truth of His word and Presence in the Eucharist. St. Peter's is therefore intentionally a community where we are being inspired and equipped to live as a Eucharistic people.

So, on this Thanksgiving Weekend let's think together how the Eucharist inspires and equips us to be Eucharistic people.

In our Gospel reading we are told that the leper who returned to Jesus thanked him”. The word for “thanked” is eucheristo – the same as the word Eucharist. With this in mind, listen to again to the words Jesus speaks at the end of the Gospel text:

"Rise and go," Jesus said, "your faith has made you well."

That is like the dismissal at the end of the Eucharist. Here is the question I want to ask you and ask myself. Is my experience of Jesus forming the kind of faith that is truly thankful with deep reverence for Jesus expressed by the leper prostrating himself before the Lord? Or do I like the nine take my faith for granted and thereby take Jesus for granted?

For all of us, gratitude does not just happen. It is an expression of our faith that is necessary to cultivate. Today's readings encourage us to see gratitude expressed with an attitude that is enthusiastic, energetic and ecstatic – what I am calling the three E's of the Eucharist.

The word enthusiasm comes from the Greek: “entheos” which means to be “possessed by God”. True enthusiasm grows from knowing that God is the fundamental relationship of my life. No other relationship is more important.

This is something Naaman, the main character in our first reading discovered. He was a Syrian General who had contracted leprosy. He could not find healing in his homeland and so travels to Israel where he is commanded by the Jewish prophet Elisha to wash seven times in the Jordan River. At first, he is derisive of such direction, saying the rivers in Syria are far greater than this backwater brook! But get this. In the end he chooses to be obedient. As a result, not only is he

healed of his leprosy, but even more importantly his life is now characterized by an enthusiastic gratefulness.

He awakens to a new wonder and praise of the goodness of God.

“Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel”

Here is a man who is discovering what it means to live *entheos*.

Before Naaman had washed in the Jordan he was brash and arrogant and puffed up with a kind of nationalistic self-importance. Now that he has met the one and true Lord he is humble and generous. Notice how this influences him. He says to Elisha:

please accept a present from your servant.

Notice as well that while Elisha will not receive a gift from Naaman, this spurs Naaman on to even greater enthusiasm and he respectfully asks for a gift from Elisha.

If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the Lord.

Why do you suppose Naaman asked for two mule loads of earth? Now that he is healed, he is going to have to head back home to Syria. Within his culture, he believed that gods were tied to their own geographical location. In order to worship the God of Israel in Syria he would need some of Israel’s earth to worship Israel’s God properly.

Now we might think, that’s archaic. There is enthusiasm but Naaman, don’t you think that’s a little extreme?

Naaman was discovering something that the biblical witness makes abundantly clear. The places of worship and the forms of worship that are “entheos” are also inconvenient and they interrupt our lives. For Naaman, it meant loading up two mules with earth before he began his journey northward. For us it means coming to Mass. It requires time, it requires effort. In short it requires enthusiasm.

Gratitude is also energetic. The root of the word energy is “ergon”, a word that means “work”. Gratitude is something that requires energy – work on our part as illustrated when St. Paul says to Timothy:

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel

Remembering here, as so often in the Bible, is not merely a calling to mind, it is a particular kind of work. It is the fixing of one’s attention, an activation of faith in the wonder of Jesus Christ. In the midst of the problems Timothy was facing it could be possible to forget the very person who has inspired such a revolutionary faith in the first place¹.

¹ Montague, G. T. (2008). *First and Second Timothy, Titus*. (P. S. Williamson & M. Healy, Eds.) (p. 161). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Think of St. Paul. As he writes this he is in jail for his faith. Do you know that Paul spent over half of his life during his years as a Christian in jail? Did jail time deflate him? Did jail time discourage him? Did jail time disillusion him? No, just the opposite. Listen to the energy in these sentences.

I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained.

The only other time this word “criminal” is used in the New Testament is in reference to the two crucified next to Jesus, the criminals on his left and right. In the eyes of Nero, who was responsible for Paul’s imprisonment, he was a criminal. But the crooked Emperor’s verdict was not going to deter Paul. No, he says, I will endure everything

for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Here is a man whose words glow with a divine energy because the eternal glory put everything in perspective. It helped him to recognize that even his suffering was being used by Jesus in the service of the Gospel.

An early Church Father, St. Chrysostom captured the influence of this energy when he said:

“For just as it is impossible to bind a sunbeam or to shut it up within the house, so neither can the preaching of the word be bound.”²

Saint Paul was constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God. And so, his was a life marked by energetic gratitude.

Enthusiastic and energetic gratitude in turn leads to living ecstatically. We see this kind of ecstasy in the one leper who returned to Jesus to thank him. Remember how in the story that it was as the men started walking away from Jesus that they were healed and made well. Nine of the ten just kept on walking away. They kept going their own way. Only this one man turned back to Jesus. The word ecstasy means to “stand outside of oneself”. The very thing this man was able to do. He realized that his encounter with Jesus meant recognition that required a response. He discovered what both Naaman and Paul also knew, that true ecstasy is the fruit of a life where we discover enthusiasm and energy whereby the Eucharist is the place where we can rise and go from this place strengthened in our faith.

Eucharistic people are generous people because they have an enthusiasm, energy and ecstasy that grounds their lives as they in turn extend a grateful heart and life to others.

In the months ahead the leadership of St. Peter’s will be inviting all of us to discover more fully what it means to be part of this Rock built on the foundation of Truth thereby inspiring and equipping us to be an Eucharistic people.

² Montague, G. T. (2008). *First and Second Timothy, Titus*. (P. S. Williamson & M. Healy, Eds.) (p. 162). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Father Jonathan quoted this at the end of the homily and has included it for your prayerful consideration:

Some Definite Service: John Henry Newman

God knows me and calls me by my name....
 God has created me to do Him some definite service;
 He has committed some work to me
 which He has not committed to another.
 I have my mission—I never may know it in this life,
 but I shall be told it in the next.

Somehow, I am necessary for His purposes...
 I have a part in this great work;
 I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection
 between persons.
 He has not created me for naught. I shall do good,
 I shall do His work;
 I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth
 in my own place, while not intending it,
 if I do but keep His commandments
 and serve Him in my calling.

Therefore I will trust Him.
 Whatever, wherever I am,
 I can never be thrown away.
 If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him;
 In perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him;
 If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.
 My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be
 necessary causes of some great end,
 which is quite beyond us.
 He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life,
 He may shorten it;
 He knows what He is about.
 He may take away my friends,
 He may throw me among strangers,
 He may make me feel desolate,
 make my spirits sink, hide the future from me—
 still He knows what He is about....
 Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see—
 I ask not to know—I ask simply to be used.