

Wednesday Reflection

Title: Faith: Genuine and Faux

Date: October 12, 2025

ID: 28th Sunday of the Year (C cycle)

Scripture: Luke 17:11-19.

Text: Our search is for what faith does to, in, and for us. *The Cleansing of the Ten Lepers* blends two crucial issues into one: (1) genuine versus faux religion; and (2) the universal reach of God's mercy.

In Luke's travelogue, Jesus is heading to Jerusalem. It's a one-way trip. Jesus knew the political and religious leadership was angry with him. By reputation, Jerusalem was the place for the martyrdom of prophets. Luke implies what John describes: "He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him" (John 1:11). To find the meaning for us, we should note that Luke packs three levels of history into each passage: Jesus's time (around 30 AD), the evangelist's time (around 85 AD), and the readers' time (now). We are "his own people" now.

Like us, the ten lepers know about Jesus. This seems strange in the text because Jesus is in a foreign place for the first time (17:11-13). The lepers (and Luke's community and we) know his name and, more importantly, they (and Luke's community and we) know his empathy.

The first of the two issues play out. Luke contrasts genuine religion based on gratitude to a faux religion based on law and social order. Jesus instructs the lepers to follow the law and have priests certify their cure. They have reason for scrupulousness. Certification allows them to return home, worship in the Temple and synagogue, and rejoin society. One cleansed leper follows the Lord's way, however. Full of gratitude, he acknowledges the Lord's empathy.

A religion based on law leads to resentment. *Thou shalt* and *thou shalt not* feel like oppression, particularly when a political-religious power enforces the law. Although it hides in rubric-driven worship, a law-oriented religion can turn its resentment to God. Oppression breeds anger, contempt, and hatred toward those liberated from it. In part, resentment explains the anger and contempt for the liberated and liberating Jesus (4:18-19).

A religion based on gratitude makes one generous in return. An interpersonal and societal graciousness emerges. A gracious attitude to God also develops; note the cured one's worshipful response (17:15-16).

Luke presses on to the second issue: what if God's mercy saturates the earth? Luke insists we grapple with the fact that God's mercy extends to all people, even people not like us, even people who are our enemies. In a simple sentence, Luke announces, "He was a Samaritan" (17:16). Then, Luke puts the proclamation in the Lord's mouth: "Has none but this foreigner..." (17:18). Setting aside fear of escalating resentment, the faith of Jesus Christ professes One God whose mercy extends to all. Jesus rejects a faux faith tied to one's laws, one's tribe, one's nation, one's way of life. Genuine faith invites us to celebrate the world's salvation by demonstrating gratitude to God and graciousness to all.