

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C (2025)

I would like to share with you a story by Martin Bell, entitled "Where Are the Nine?"

Jesus healed ten lepers, and only one of them returned to give thanks. That must be a nice thing to be able to do.

But what about the other nine? It's simple, really. One of them was frightened— that's all. She didn't understand what had happened, and it frightened her. So, she looked for a place to hide. Jesus scared her.

A second was offended because he had not been required to do anything. It was all too easy. He had expected months, maybe years, of fasting and prayer. He had not earned his reward. His motto was "you get what you pay for." And so, Jesus offended him.

The third had realized too late that he had not really wanted to be cleansed. He didn't know what to do or how to live without his leprosy.

Although it had been his fervent plea to be healed, he now began to see how much he needed his leprosy, how it had defined him as a person. He didn't say thanks. Jesus had taken away his identity.

It is difficult to explain the reason why the fourth leper did not return to give thanks. Perhaps because it is such a simple reason— the fourth leper did not return because, in her euphoria and joy, she forgot. That's all. She was so happy, she forgot.

The fifth leper wasn't willing to say thank you to anyone. There is something that happens to a man who must beg, who is ignored, who is grudgingly thrown a few coins, and is expected to say thank you. He doesn't say thank you anymore to anybody— not even to Jesus.

The sixth leper was a mother who had been separated from her family for eleven years because of her leprosy. She was now free to rejoin her husband and children. She did not return to give thanks because she was in a hurry. She simply went straight home.

The seventh leper didn't believe that Jesus had anything to do with his cleansing. He knew that he was healed. He didn't know why. He didn't know how. He didn't believe in magic or miracles. There must have been a perfectly good explanation of what had happened, and Jesus didn't have anything to do with it.

The eighth leper did not return because he believed that Jesus was the Messiah. The Kingdom of God had finally arrived. He had no time to return to give thanks. He hurried off to preach the Good News.

What shall I say about the ninth leper? Why didn't he return? It is impossible to say precisely why he did not return to give thanks.

So, there you have it. Have you learned your lesson? What? Is there a lesson? Clearly, and it is this. Judgment and condemnation are easier than asking questions, digging deeply, and trying to understand what really happened.

But let's not kid ourselves – we rashly judge people all the time. We judge them by their actions, how they speak, the way they dress, and how they carry themselves.

We must take the time to investigate why people make decisions. It gives us insight— the ability to understand someone’s behavior in the light of their circumstances.

What is there in fallen man that finds pleasure in judging the motives, the innermost intentions, the hearts of others? Saint Francis de Sales gives us his diagnosis: “The sins of others are diversions from our own.”

The next time you are tempted to criticize someone else, before you utter a word, stop and say a prayer for that person. Before you criticize, pray for them. Pray first. Ask God to bless that person. Pray that God will guide them.

St. Theresa of Calcutta has left us this: “If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”