

Ingratitude stops flow of blessings

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

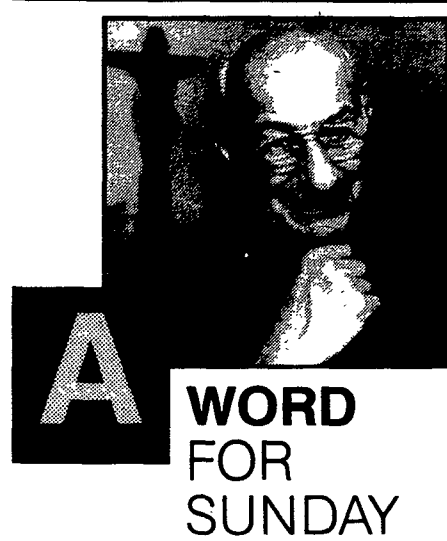
Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 17:11-19; (R1) 2 Kings 5:14-17; (R2) 2 Timothy 2:8-13.

The Gospel and Sunday's first reading are a study in likenesses and contrasts. Naaman was a leper, as was the Samaritan. Both were cured from a distance. Both returned to give thanks.

While Naaman was a proud, powerful general, the Samaritan was a poor, nameless beggar. Naaman went to the prophet Elisha for his remedy. The Samaritan went to Jesus, the greatest of the prophets, to be cured.

After chapter nine in his Gospel, St. Luke devotes his narrative to Jesus's teachings. The only miracle he mentions after chapter nine is the cure of the 10 lepers. And he does this to teach the importance of gratitude.

Gratitude is so very important because one gift accepted gratefully opens the door to countless other gifts. In saying "thank you," one often receives more than one expects. Thus Naaman's gratitude and that of the Samaritan earned a grace greater than their cure: the grace of



salvation.

Naaman asked Elisha if he could have two mule-loads of earth. In those days (850 B.C.), people believed that the gods were attached to the land, so much so that outside that land they could not exercise their power. Naaman, therefore, asked Elisha for earth so that he too could worship the God of Elisha.

The same thing happened to the grateful Samaritan: he received salvation. Jesus said to him, "Your faith has been your salvation ..."

Ingratitude, on the contrary, stops the flow of blessings. As Shakespeare put it: "One good deed dying tongueless slaughters a thousand others waiting upon it." While Caesar was being assassinated, he fought like a tiger until he saw his friend Brutus draw his sword against him. Surprised, Caesar exclaimed, "Et tu, Brute?" (And you, Brutus?) Then fall, Caesar! And Marc Antony said in his funeral oration: "Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms, / Quite vanquished him: then burst his mighty heart." Ingratitude springs from pride, and God resists the proud.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul says to be grateful not only for blessings, but also for adversity. "In all circumstances give thanks for this is the will of God for you" (1 Th. 5:18).

I happened to be reading that passage in the Syracuse airport while waiting for my flight to Maryland. After sitting there about a half hour, the announcement came over the public-address system that my flight had been canceled.

I was a bit perturbed since I had to be in Maryland the next day for a lecture. Also, I was stranded at the airport, for not expecting a cancella-

tion I had made no provisions for anyone to pick me up. However, I had just read Paul so I said in my heart, "OK, Lord, thank you!"

As I headed for a phone booth to make a call for someone to come from Auburn and pick me up, a young girl came by, whom I hardly knew, and said, "Oh, Father Shamon! I'm going to Auburn, want a ride?" I could hardly believe it. So Paul's passage will always stick in my mind: "In all circumstances give thanks ..."

People often come to me and say, "You don't know what I'm going through." Now I say, "Give thanks anyway." Paul said, "Give thanks in all circumstances ..." For we cannot know whether some of our burdens may someday be blessings.

Incidentally, the girl that gave me a ride to Auburn said, "Father, I've been wanting to get to confession." I said, "Great, go now," so she did. You see, God writes straight in crooked lines. So, in all circumstances, give thanks.

Where are you? Are you with the nine who take life and its many blessings for granted? Or do you have a song in your heart — a song of thanksgiving to God for all He has done for you?

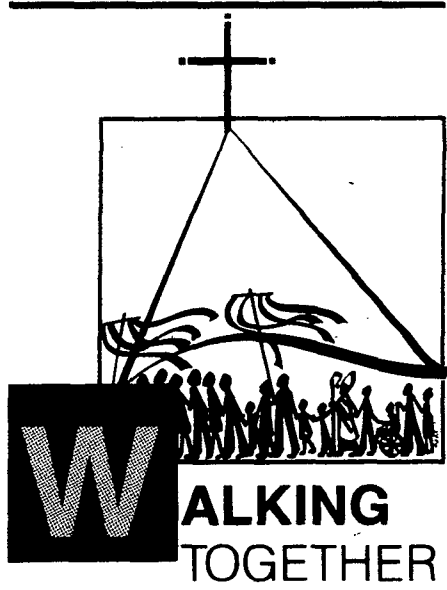
A sacred mission to make things better

By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

One morning a couple of weeks ago, we discovered a message left on our answering machine from 2:36 a.m. the night before. It was from a pastor of several small parishes who called the Synod Office to say that he was so excited by his parish's synod discussions that he couldn't sleep. "It was absolutely wonderful!" he said.

Many people have written or called us — though most during the daylight hours — to express their excitement over the Synod's progress. It is indeed a very moving thing when the local church comes alive and everyone in it plays his or her part in planning to carry out the church's mission. One can almost feel the Spirit at work.

It is through such cooperation, prayer and discernment that we contribute to the building up of the local church. It is through such work that the Reign of God comes on earth. For every time a cup of water is offered to the thirsty, every time our support strengthens a floundering marriage, every time our loving care sustains a burdensome pregnancy we can celebrate for "the Reign of God is in your midst" (Lk 17:21).



This is not to say, however, that everything will be perfect once the Synod is complete. A few priest friends of mine are concerned that some of their parishioners have too high expectations for the Synod. They feel that some hold a view that we just need to work harder, put a few more programs into place, mobilize just a little more, and heaven shall appear on earth. We know that this is just not true.

Life in this world is always a mixture of much good with much that still needs to be improved. Our

Christian lives, for example, are already the life of the saved but not yet the fullness of salvation. We live a life of grace but not yet a life without sin. As individuals and as church we live a divided existence: already ... but not yet. "The Reign of God is in your midst" (Lk 17:21), Jesus tells us, but he also admonishes us to continue to pray "may your Reign come" (Lk 11:2).

Because the church's life is a life in tension between the already and the not yet, we will still have much work to do even after our synod process is complete. After all the recommendations have been made, prioritized and implemented, after all of our effort and struggle to more effectively carry out the church's mission, the church of Rochester will still not be perfect "without any stain or wrinkle or anything of that sort" (Eph 5:27). We know that it will only be perfect by God's doing at the end of time.

This should not discourage us because, by God's grace, we can and must make things better than they are. This is why we spend our time and energy in synods. This is why we try to formulate recommendations which will help our local church to grow. This is why we reorganize, reform and redeploy our resources. We are on a sacred

mission to make things better: the Gospel demands it.

While Jesus's mission among us was to preach the good news that the Reign of God was near, he could not pass by the sick without curing them. As his disciples, we are asked to act in like manner. "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:15).

As his disciples we must not let the hungry go without food nor the homeless without shelter. We cannot be unconcerned about marriage and family life nor the struggles of those who face death or a burdensome pregnancy alone.

The Synod will not formulate an answer to every question or problem that confronts us. It will not achieve a perfect local church without sin and tensions and pain. It will not make our parishes perfect nor our pastors saints.

But it will help us all to carry out more effectively our baptismal responsibility for the church's mission. It will help us to celebrate our reality as church with all its goodness and all its imperfection. It will help us to celebrate the reign of God in our midst — already, but not yet.

Father Hart is director of the diocesan Synod.

The Rochester Area Pepper Center is looking for some participants to take part in a research study at Strong Memorial Hospital. The research study is under the direction of Dr. Stephen Welle and is looking at muscle degeneration in the elderly. Volunteers should be: 1. healthy 2. non-smoking 3. 60 years or older. If you are interested in attending an informational meeting please call 274 - 7519, M-F 9am-3pm . Compensation :\$1,500.00



Call 723-8760

Personalized to meet your needs:

- Companionship
- Senior sitting
- Shopping
- Meal Prep
- Respite Care
- Transportation
- Light Cleaning



Reasonable Rates!
Fully Insured. Bonded

1100 Long Pond Rd. Suite 3