

None of us would think it fair to judge another based on a singular event in that person's childhood. And yet, some memories are so powerful that they are ingrained. When attending a neighbor child's birthday party more than 50 years ago, the image is hard to shake. Gift after gift was opened, toys, games and the like. And yet, at one point, the neighbor kid said with a whiny voice, "Is that all?" **Is that all?" I thought!** It looked like quite the haul from my perspective.

In today's Gospel, we witness what resulted from a lack of gratitude for the gift of healing. Only one in ten returned to give thanks. Where were the other nine? If we are not truly grateful for the gift of our faith, we should not be surprised if the next generation stops caring. What you and I may take for granted, will not of necessity pass on to our children.

The 1st c. B.C. Roman philosopher Cicero discussed gratitude. He wrote:
In truth, O judges, while I wish to be adorned with every virtue, yet there is nothing which I can esteem more highly than the being and appearing grateful. For this one virtue is not only the greatest, but is also the parent of all the other virtues."¹

For background, Cicero was defending his friend Plancius in a court matter dealing with of all things, election fraud! His friend was acquitted of the charge. By defending him, Cicero was repaying a good deed. Three years previously, Plancius had offered support Cicero when he was cast into exile. Cicero connected gratitude to friendship. "For there is no more essential duty than that of returning kindness received"² Try this experiment. Simply scroll through your contact list in your smart phone. How well are you keeping in touch? Phone a friend from college, re-connect with someone from your old neighborhood. Be intentional in keeping your connections solid. Admittedly, my own practice of gratitude

¹ M. Tullius Cicero, *Pro Plancio*. "Etenim, iudices, cum omnibus virtutibus me adfectum esse cupio, tum nihil est quod malim quam me et esse gratum et videri. haec enim est una virtus non solum maxima sed etiam mater virtutum omnium reliquarum *XXXIII [80]*"

² Cicero, *De Officiis [On Duties; On Moral Duty; The Offices]*, Book 1, ch. 15

has been a mixed bag. I feel perpetually behind with respect to writing thank you notes, including to parishioners, though I write plenty of them.

In our first reading, through the ministry of Elisha, the Lord rewarded the pagan Naaman, bringing him to a liberating truth. Naaman was an essentially Syrian warlord, who suffered from a grave skin condition. In gratitude, he offered a gift, but it was refused out of humility. Elisha felt it would be simply wrong to accept Naaman's gift, given the fact the prophet has not performed the healing himself, but God.

But Naaman persisted and understood. This time he names the Lord, the source of his healing. He acknowledges the Lord's power by asking for some soil that he can bring home with him, for it is holy ground. Though unfamiliar with Jewish tradition, he proved to be a quick study.

Vatican II taught that salvation is open to all through Jesus Christ and that elements of God's truth are present outside the visible boundaries of the Church. God's truth is sometimes revealed through the most unlikely of instruments, people who without guile, sense the truth absent the benefit of formal catechesis. Though he was a pagan, Naaman got it.

We are blessed with the fullness of means through the sacraments of the Church, that we may encounter Christ. Let us participate in the missionary zeal of the Church by whatever means possible, bringing the fullness of the truth of Jesus Christ to others. There are many Naaman's out there in the world, waiting for the invitation to believe, with open minds and open hearts to God, a God they may hardly even know at all.

It is our sacred duty to ensure that they are exposed to the richness of our faith, especially by means of our own example. Will we answer the call?