

28th Sunday Ordinary Time – Cycle C
Delivered by Deacon Ron Tocci
October 14,2007

I recently came across this letter that appeared in Dear Abby's newspaper column: **Dear Abby**, *Happiness is having parents who don't get mad when you come home late.... Happiness is having your own bedroom... Happiness is getting the phone call you've been praying for... Happiness is knowing that you're as well dressed as everybody else... Happiness is something I don't have.* – **Signed- 15 and unhappy.** ...A few days later, a 13-yr old sent this response to that letter: **Dear Abby**, *Happiness is being able to walk... Happiness is being able to talk. Happiness is being able to see. Happiness is being able to hear. Unhappiness is reading a letter from a 15 yr old girl who can do all these things and still says she isn't happy. I can talk, I can see, I can hear, but I can't walk.* **Signed- 13 and Happy.**

I read you these letters because – like the Gospel story we just heard - they convey a message about gratitude - thankfulness - for the good things God does for us and God gives to us...In the Gospel story, 10 lepers – 10 people with this horrible disease that made them outcasts not only from their community, but from their own families – came to Jesus desperately longing to be cured...And He cured them. ...He cured all 10,...But only 1 came back to thank Him...Jesus responds to the ingratitude of the other 9, saying: “ Were not 10 of them healed? ...Where are the other 9?”...Has only this foreigner come to give thanks to God?...The Gospel doesn't tell us if Jesus was angry, or disappointed or hurtBut we can tell He wasn't very happy with them...I have to admit that this Gospel always makes me squirm a little because – when it comes to gratitude -I have a lot in common with those 9 ungrateful lepers and that **first** letter writer.Oh, I have no trouble falling on my knees and thanking God for the big things ...like when Cathy and I finally got the precious grandchild we had been waiting for for so long,...or when I had my cancer surgery, and everything went well,...and I didn't need chemo or radiation...I have no problem praising and thanking God for those **special** blessings...But when it comes to the everyday blessings – like the ones that **13-yr** old letter writer is so grateful for - I'm afraid I'm not very big on the “thank you's.” ...I'll bet some of you can say the same thing, huh?

Now, by “thank you's” I don't mean just saying the words...That's easy enough...”Thank you God”... “Thank you Lord”...”Thank you Jesus.”...It's good to say the words...That should always be a part of giving thanks...a part of thanksgiving...But more important than my **saying** the words is my **living** the words...More important than my “thanksgiving” is my “**thanks-living**”....thanks-living....**Thanks-living** is living in a way that everything I think or say or do is done with complete awareness and appreciation of the good things God has done for me and continues to do for me...**Thanks-living** is living in a way that doesn't take for granted the gifts and blessings God has given me – as if I've done something to deserve them.

Thanks-living is showing my gratitude by using these gifts and blessings as God asks me to: for the benefit of others so that they will experience God's love through me...**Thanks-living** is being aware of the good God is doing even when things are going bad...It's holding on and trusting in God when I'm knocked down by trials, troubles or tragedy...**Thanks-living** is looking around at my world, my situation, and realizing that everything I have, everything I can do,...my talents and abilities,...my energy, my strength...every favorable circumstance, every opportunity I've used to get what I have, every success, every achievement I've made...ALL come from God!...NOT FROM ME!...I might be the hardest worker around, but I can only play the cards I've been dealt...and God has dealt me some pretty good cards...And for this, God deserves to have 1st place in my life...God deserves that I not only **give** Him my thanks, but that I **live** my thanks....As I said, that's not something I'm very good at doing...How about you?

Well, you know, we are so lucky...because when we behave like those 9 lepers who Jesus made clean, but who didn't come back to thank Him, Jesus forgives us...He overlooks our thanklessness just as He did theirs... He could've easily turned those 9 ungrateful men back into lepers, but He didn't. ...He could easily punish our ingratitude and take away the good things He has given us and done for us...but He doesn't...Here are some examples of what I mean. See if any of them ring true for you.

When I forget to thank God for the food I have to eat...When I open my kitchen pantry, stacked with cans and boxes, ...and every variety of snax and chips, and I stand there complaining that I can't find anything I want to eat,...God could see to it that that pantry would suddenly be emptied and that I would learn what it is to be hungry...**But He doesn't.** ...When I look enviously at my neighbor's big, beautiful house with the in-ground pool, the hi-tech kitchen and all those bathrooms,...and I forget to say thank you, Lord, for the comfortable house I live in,...God could see to it that my family and I were thrown out into the streets...**But He doesn't.**...When I forget to thank God for my job because it's so routine and monotonous,...God could see to it that I end up on the unemployment line struggling to feed my family...**But He doesn't.**...When my alarm clock rings in the morning, and I growl and pull the blanket over my head and I don't remember to say thank you, Lord, that I'm able to get up and enjoy the gift of a new day,...God could see to it that I never hear that alarm again...**But He doesn't.**

When I get so upset at my parents for not trusting me,...for always asking me where I'm going, who I'm going with, what I'll be doing,...that I really don't feel like thanking God for them, ...God could take them from me and leave me to care for myself...**But He doesn't.**...When I spend money frivolously on things I don't need, and give little or no thought to using it instead to help someone who needs it just to be able to live,...God could see to it that I end up poor and penniless and dependent on the help of others...**But He doesn't.**...When I forget to thank God for my life with all of its joys and all its sorrows,... when I forget to thank God for watching over me every day like a mother watches over her children,...when I forget to thank God...He could erase my life, take it away from me, and erase any memory of me forever....**But He doesn't. ...He doesn't.**

God doesn't operate that way...God doesn't take back His blessings when we are ungrateful.Instead, He continues to shower His blessings on us every day, more blessings than we can begin to count and certainly more than we deserve,...in spite of our thanklessness...God knows that in our humanness, we don't always grasp and appreciate just how blessed we are. There's an old Jewish story that illustrates this point: *It's about a man who goes to the rabbi and complains, "Rabbi, my life is unbearable.... There are 9 of us living in one room. What can I do?" ... The rabbi answers, "Take your goat into the room with you."... The man is incredulous; the rabbi must be kidding... But the rabbi insists: "Do as I say and come back in a week."... A week later the man comes back looking more distraught than before... He tells the rabbi: "We can't stand it... The goat is filthy and he smells.".... The rabbi then tells him, "Go home and let the goat out. Come back in a week."... A week later, the man returns to the rabbi, smiling ear to ear, exclaiming, "Life is beautiful... The 9 of us are enjoying every minute of it now that there is no goat." ... The situation was the same as before, but now the man realized how blessed he was to begin with.*

I hope none of us need to have a dirty, smelly goat come live with us in order to make us grateful for what we have....I think most of us **know** how fortunate we are,...but we also know we can do better at our thanksgiving and our thanks-living...And we can start right here – right now - during this Eucharistic Celebration...The word "eucharist" means thanksgiving...We're here to thank God and praise God for giving us all of His magnificent creation, for promising us a home in heaven if we are faithful to Him... We're here to give thanks and that's good. ...But there are many more out there who are not here. ...I'm sure Jesus is pleased we are here, but

He's gotta be asking – as He did in our Gospel – “Where are the others? Why haven't they come to give thanks to God?”...I don't know why they're not here....All I know is that God has been good to me...God has blessed me...God has healed me. ...God has lifted me...and I am here to praise Him and thank Him the best way I can,...and I hope you feel the same way...As for those who are not here, maybe if we did a better job of **thanks-living**, maybe if we were better at letting our gratitude for God's blessings show through in our attitudes and actions...in the choices we make...in the way we treat one another...maybe, just maybe, they would see something in us that would make them say, “That's how I should be.” ...Then, maybe, just maybe, the empty seats in here will start being filled...So, let's leave here committed to do better at **thanks-living...OK?..Are you with me?** If you're with me, say “AMEN!”...Our gracious, generous, loving, forgiving God deserves nothing less. AMEN.