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"Have the certainty that you are loved"

In his 30 December general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechesis on prayer, focusing on the prayer of thanksgiving.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

Today, I would like to focus on the prayer of thanksgiving. And I take my cue from an episode recounted by the Evangelist Luke. While Jesus

was on the way, ten lepers approached Him who begged him: “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” (17:13). We know that those who had leprosy suffered not only physically, but also from social marginalization and religious marginalization. They were marginalized. Jesus did not back off from meeting them. Sometimes, He surpassed the limitations imposed by the law and touched, embraced and healed the sick person – which was not supposed to be done. In this case, there was no contact. From a distance, Jesus invited them to present themselves to the priests (v. 14), who were designated by law to certify healings that had occurred. Jesus said nothing else. He heard their prayer, He heard their cry for mercy, and He sent them immediately to the priests.

Those ten lepers trusted, they did not remain there until they were cured,

no: they trusted and they went immediately, and while they were on their way, they were cured, all ten were cured. The priests would have therefore been able to verify their healing and readmit them to normal life. But this is where the important point enters in: only one in the group, before going to the priests, returned to thank Jesus and to praise God for the grace received. Only one, the other nine continued on their way. And Jesus points out that that man was a Samaritan, a sort of "heretic" for the Jews of that time. Jesus comments: "Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (17:18). This narrative is touching.

This narrative, so to speak, divides the world in two: those who do not give thanks and those who do; those who take everything as if it is owed them, and those who welcome everything as a gift, as grace. The

Catechism says: “every event and need can become an offering of thanksgiving” (n. 2638). The prayer of thanksgiving always begins here: to recognize that grace precedes us. We were thought of before we learned how to think; we were loved before we learned how to love; we were desired before our hearts conceived a desire. If we view life like this, then “thank you” becomes the driving force of our day. And how often we even forget to say “thank you”.

For us Christians, thanksgiving was the name given to the most essential Sacrament there is: the *Eucharist*. In fact, the Greek word, means precisely this: *thanksgiving, eucharist: thanksgiving*. Christians, as all believers, bless God for the gift of life. To live is above all to have received. To live is above all to have received: to have received life! All of us are born because someone

wanted us to have life. And this is only the first of a long series of debts that we incur by living. Debts of gratitude. During our lives, more than one person has gazed on us with pure eyes, gratuitously. Often, these people are educators, catechists, persons who carried out their roles above and beyond what was required of them. And they provoked us to be grateful. Even friendship is a gift for which we should always be grateful.

This “thank you” that we must say continually, this thanks that Christians share with everyone, grows *in meeting Jesus*. The Gospels attest that when Jesus passed by, He often provoked joy and praise to God in those whom He met. The Gospel accounts are filled with prayerful people who are greatly touched by the coming of the Saviour. And we too are called to participate in this immense jubilation. The episode of

the ten lepers who are healed also suggests this. Naturally, all of them were happy for having recovered their health, allowing them to end that unending forced quarantine that excluded them from the community. But among them, there was one who experienced an additional joy: in addition to being healed, he rejoices at meeting Jesus. He is not only freed from evil, but he now possesses the certainty of being loved. This is the crux: when you thank someone, give thanks, you express the certainty that you are loved. And this is a huge step: to have the certainty that you are loved. It is the discovery of love as the force that governs the world – as Dante said: the Love that "moves the sun and other stars" (*Paradise*, XXXIII, 145). We are no longer vagabonds wandering aimlessly here and there, no: we have a home, we dwell in Christ, and from that "dwelling" we contemplate the rest of the world which appears infinitely

more beautiful to us. We are children of love, we are brothers and sisters of love. We are men and woman who thank.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us seek to remain always in the joy of encountering Jesus. Let us cultivate joyfulness. The devil, instead, after having deluded us – with whatever temptation – always leaves us sad and alone. If we are in Christ, there is no sin and no threat that can ever prevent us from continuing joyfully on our way, together with many other companions on the road.

Above all, let us not forget to thank: if we are bearers of gratitude, the world itself will become better, even if only a little bit, but that is enough to transmit a bit of hope. The world needs hope. And with gratitude, with this habit of saying thank you, we transmit a bit of hope. Everything is united and everything is connected,

and everyone needs to do his or her part wherever we are. The path to happiness is the one Saint Paul described at the end of one of his letters: “Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit” (*1 Thes* 5:17-19). Do not quench the Spirit, what a beautiful project of life! Do not quench the Spirit who we have within and who leads us to gratitude. Thank you.

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