



BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

Thanksgiving Day
November 27, 2025
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Sirach 50:22-24
Psalm 145
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Luke 17:11-19

One of my favorite Thanksgiving memories is from when I was visiting home during college. We were just sitting down to eat when the doorbell rang. My mother opened the door to a young woman, a complete stranger to her, who was standing there holding a bunch of flowers from Shop-Rite (she hadn't wanted to show up empty handed). "Mrs. Monahan?" She said very uncertainly "My name is Betsy. My parents had left for my grandparents' before I got home from Marching Band and Sara said it would be OK if I came over...." My mother put the flowers in a vase on the table, while my father set another place and Betsy (whose last name I do not know to this day) has been a regular although not annual fixture at my family Thanksgiving table since.

As this story suggests, Thanksgiving is a messy holiday. Most of us hold an idealized, greeting card version of happy families sitting around an immaculate table eating beautifully prepared food. Many of us even have memories of or expectations for such Thanksgivings, in which we are all welcomed in the way my parents were able to welcome Betsy.

As we gather for Thanksgiving today, I know that many of us are pleased for the chance to take time to spend with family and friends, to pause and give thanks for all we have been given.

And I strongly suspect that many of us are also struggling with things that make it difficult to give thanks as we feel we this holiday demands: We can all name events or struggles for us as individuals, as a community, as a nation, and as a global community that make us feel more like Betsy; struggling to give thanks because we aren't certain that we're going to be welcomed or have a place at the table.

And into that messiness we are presented with today's scriptures. The first two readings, and even the psalm response, paint an image that might seem more similar to the picture perfect greeting card Thanksgiving that sometimes gets in the way of our actual experience of thanksgiving. I'll get back to them.

Today's Gospel, though, reminds us that Jesus came not to negate our human messiness, but to enter into it with us. This is a Jesus who knows what it's like to struggle as a human, to feel marginalized or unwelcome or uncertain. AND the Gospel also presents us with moments of community and gratitude and the recognition of God's love and mercy present even in the mess.

The first line of the Gospel reminds us that Jesus is headed up to Jerusalem; he is already turning toward his own crucifixion. And he is doing so, by traveling along the margins, traveling through Samaria and Galilee. He's at the edge of a village when he is approached by the lepers; men who were the very embodiment of marginalized.

But these men, living at the edge of their own society have also formed a community of sorts. And a community that is more welcoming than the ones from which they came. We know at least one of them—the one who returned to glorify God and give thanks to Jesus—was a Samaritan; a man who would not have been allowed to be part of a Galilean village. A man for whom showing himself to the priests would have accomplished little since he would not have been accepted into Jewish society anyway.

And he returns; not just to thank Jesus, but to glorify God. He is grateful for his healing, and recognizes it as something worthy of gratitude, but also acknowledges and glorifies the giver of the gift. And this is where I can finally return to the earlier scriptures. These readings; particularly Sirach and the Psalm remind us to give thanks, but they point beyond the things for which we are giving thanks to God as the giver of these things; who delivers us; as Sirach says, not out of our messiness, but through and in our messiness.

And I think that's what we are invited to today; and indeed every time we gather around a table; be it this altar or the tables in the dining room. We are invited to recognize ourselves both as Betsy desperately hoping that someone will be there for us; AND as my family; making room for the lost soul who shows up unexpectedly. We are invited bring all of our messiness; individual and communal and to remind ourselves that God is present with us. And to give thanks to and glorify a God who joins us in our messiness.