Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ
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28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Date: Sunday, October 12, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: 2 Kings 5:14–17
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 98:1–4 | **Response:** Psalm 98:2b
Second Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8–13
Gospel Acclamation: 1 Thessalonians 5:18
Gospel Reading: Luke 17:11–19
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Imagine standing by a river. The water is muddy, moving quickly past your feet. You've been sick for a long time. People avoid you. You've tried everything. Then a man of God tells you, "Wash in this river, and you'll be clean." You wonder—can something so simple really change anything? In ancient times, rivers were seen not only as places of physical washing but also as places of spiritual power. Washing was a sign of being made new. It was a way of letting go of the past and stepping into a new future. For us as Christians, this reminds us of baptism—that moment when we were washed with water and reborn in Christ. Baptism isn't something we earned. It's grace freely given, a sign that God chooses to make us new. That's why stepping into the Jordan River was such a big moment for Naaman. He wasn't just washing off disease. He was opening his heart to something greater—God's healing mercy.

In our first reading, Naaman is a powerful army commander from Syria, but he is suffering from leprosy. He goes to Elisha, the prophet of Israel, for help. Elisha tells him to wash seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman is at first angry—he expected a dramatic healing. But he humbles himself. He steps into the river. Seven times. And when he comes out, he is healed. More than that, he is changed. He goes back to Elisha and says, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel." His healing becomes worship. His cleansing becomes gratitude. And that's something we all need to understand: real purity is not about clean skin or outward appearances. It's about a heart that returns to God with thanks.

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In the Gospel of Luke, we hear a similar story. Ten people with leprosy call out to Jesus from a distance. “Master, have mercy on us!” they shout. Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priests. And as they walk, they are healed. But only one of them turns back. Only one comes back to say thank you. He falls at Jesus’ feet, praising God. And that one man is a Samaritan—an outsider. And Jesus says to him, “Your faith has saved you.” Not just healed you—saved you. Because healing is not complete until it is met with gratitude.

Gratitude makes us whole. Being thankful isn’t just good manners. It shows that we’ve recognised the gift and the giver. That we know where the healing came from—grace, not luck. One of the great spiritual teachers of our lifetime, the Benedictine monk Brother David Steindl-Rast O.S.B. once wrote, “The root of joy is gratefulness… it’s not joy that makes us grateful; it is gratitude that makes us joyful.”

Psalm 98 invites the whole world to sing a new song to God. It says rivers clap their hands and mountains shout for joy. Gratitude starts with one voice, but genuine gratitude is infectious and so it spreads. It becomes joyous music. And it lifts the heart.

St. Paul’s words to Timothy echo this journey. Paul is in chains, imprisoned for the Gospel, but he writes with unrestrained conviction: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead.” Paul reminds us that even when we suffer, the Word of God is not chained. Even when we forget or fail, “if we are unfaithful, he remains faithful.” That’s the ground of all gratitude—not our strength, but God’s constancy. Not our purity, but Christ’s mercy.

Pope Leo XIV, in his first apostolic exhortation *Dilexi te*, reminds us that true peace begins when we stop taking each other for granted—when we start to see God in one another, especially in the poor, and respond with gratitude and care. When we live with gratitude, we stop competing and comparing. We begin to make space—for others, for healing, for peace.

The story of Fr Jan Beyzym, S.J. is one we should not forget. He was a Jesuit priest from Ukraine who left behind his teaching job and comfort to go to Madagascar. He chose to live among people with leprosy. He washed their

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wounds himself. He built a hospital for them. They called him *rayamendreny*—father and mother—because that's what his love felt like. His work was a thank-you to God. His life was a song of gratitude.

We still hear cries for mercy today. In our neighbourhoods, in our parishes, in the streets of Harare, Bulawayo, and many rural communities. The unemployed, the sick, the lonely, the young people who feel forgotten. They are crying out, just like the lepers did. And we, like Jesus, are called to see them, to respond, and to walk with them.

So today, let's each ask ourselves: where have I been healed? Maybe not in body, but in mind, or in relationships, or in faith. Where has God been good to me? And then, let's come back. Let's return to Jesus—not just to ask, but to thank. Let's make gratitude part of our daily prayer, our choices, and our actions.

Every Mass is a thanksgiving. The word 'Eucharist' itself means thank you. So when we come to the altar, like the healed Samaritan, we return to the One who gave everything.

This week, do one simple thing as a way of saying thank you: visit someone who's unwell, share food with someone in need, write a prayer of thanks and place it somewhere you'll see it. And next Sunday, when you come to the altar to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, bring your gratitude with you.

Because healing opens the door. Belonging invites us in. But it is gratitude that brings us to our knees in praise.

Let our lives be like Naaman's river—muddy but holy, flowing with mercy. Let them carry a song of thanks into the world.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, you healed the leper and welcomed the Samaritan. May we, who have been healed by your mercy, always return to you with grateful hearts, and may our lives become a new song of praise that lifts up the poor, the sick, and the lonely. We ask this through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

And for your reflection today:

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- Lord, show me where I’ve been healed—and help me to thank you for it.
- Help me see the people around me who feel forgotten, and welcome them as you would.
- Teach me how to return to you with a grateful heart, and live each day as a thank-you song.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today’s readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.