

Homily for the 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in OT, Cycle C  
October 14, 2007

Luke 17: 11-19

2 Timothy 2: 8-13

2 Kings 5: 14-17

"What is this?" said Fr. Jerry (as he holds up an Easter lily bulb).

Responses from the congregation: "A bird's nest, a dead branch, a sweet potato, etc...."!

It's a bulb. It looks dried up prune...wrinkled, ugly, and dead. Actually, it is an Amaryllis bulb, which is a member of the Easter lily family. When you look at this bulb, it looks dead, but it holds potential. The potentiality in this bulb is wonderful! Fall is planting time. It is time to plant bulbs; people that plant bulbs do so with the HOPE that in the Spring they will see beautiful blossoms that everyone can enjoy. Planting bulbs means HOPING for the future. Putting this in the ground, in the dark dirt of the earth is doing what needs to be done-- planning for the future.

I wonder what people saw when they looked at a leper (Luke 17:11-19). Most people saw a person with diseased skin; a leper was someone who carried a stench, and the odor was not pleasant...he would ring a bell to let people know he were coming...so that a "safe" distance could be kept. A leper was someone isolated from the community and from his family. (Holding up the Easter lily bulb, Fr. Jerry said) Jesus saw something beautiful in the leper. Jesus wanted to make the leper whole. So Jesus embraced the leper and squeezed all the ugliness out so that that person could be restored to the community.

That's what Jesus does for us. He sees something MORE in us. He sees beauty in us even when we don't see it in ourselves. He touches us and cleanses us and makes us whole. Isn't it interesting that only one leper went back to give THANKS to God. Only one leper realizing what Jesus had done for him went back, knelt at Jesus' feet and said, "Thank you". They say that's about the average for most people today. All ten lepers may have been grateful, but only one went back to EXPRESS that gratitude.

Gratitude is an attitude of the heart. It is a way of living. Life is enriched by gratitude. There is a wonderful French proverb that says "Gratitude is a memory of the heart." It's not a one-time event, but an attitude of living every day. It is remembering that everything we ARE and everything we HAVE is a gift...even if we had to work very hard for it. When we realize how blessed we are, like the Samaritan leper, we want to give back, we want to give thanks.

I knew a family who, at the beginning of November, created a "gratitude" box. They put "thanks" and "gratitude" on the outside to make it a very attractive little box. They decorated it and every member of the family, including the mother and the father, everyday put a note about something or someone they are grateful for. Then on Thanksgiving Day, after they have eaten, and throughout the day, while the football games are on, they keep pulling out the notes that name what they are thankful for. Isn't that a wonderful way to express our gratitude.

We see in the first reading today from the book of Kings, where Naaman, the Syrian, is so full of gratitude for the GRACE of his cure that he switches his allegiance from "his" gods to the ONE God of Israel. I think we do much the same thing: we tend to worship other gods. Yet when we recognize what God does for us, we too want to switch our allegiance to THE one God of Jesus Christ, who lived, died and rose for us. Once we transcend self-preoccupation, we begin to see that our minds, our bodies, our talents, our very existence are gifts lovingly bestowed on us. Our whole life is a gift.

We have been blessed here at Holy Spirit. Just in the past few months, I've had the privilege of presiding and preaching at several funerals of parishioners full of faith. It's not surprising that GRATITUDE for the gift of life is a thread that runs through their lives. We are truly blessed. There are so many good things that happen here. So many of you are involved in ministries and outreach that make things happen here at Holy Spirit. On behalf of the pastoral Team and the Council, thank you for what you contribute to our parish. We are thankful to so many parishioners. You have retired the land debt at Holy Spirit Parkside. Though we need to continue to honor our commitments, it is wonderful that the debt is retired. We are growing; we are landlocked; we need more space... not simply for a new facility, but because a new

facility will help us to minister better to the needs of parishioners and beyond.

Holy Spirit has been blessed with a great offer of \$4.75 million for this property. God has blessed us indeed with a generous offer from Living Hope Baptist Church. We knew all along that selling this property would be the difficult piece in that Long Range Plan...as we move to the new location. This generous offer certainly has accelerated our Long Range Plan, but I believe this community is up to the challenge and will take advantage of the opportunity. It means that we will have our Capital Campaign Kick Off on Sunday, October 28<sup>th</sup>. We need a pledged amount of at least \$2.5 million. This can be done! This is very do-able for this community if we all assess our blessings and make a sacrificial pledge. Everyone has an opportunity to do this, and it will take every one of us. This is a time of planting. Knowing our potential and planning for the future.

Many of us we benefit from the sacrifice of our ancestors of faith. It is now OUR TIME to step up to the plate and to be part of something for the future. I challenge each of you to make a sacrificial Pledge. I promise I will make a sacrificial pledge myself. In fact, most of you know what about my salary is...I will pledge \$6,000 over the next three years. For each of us, it's really not about what our neighbor is doing, but about how you have been blessed.

You know the story of the widow's mite--the poor widow who gave two copper coins. Jesus was observing this woman and noticed that she put two copper coins into the coffer and Jesus said, "See this woman. She has given more than all the others because she gave not from her surplus wealth but from her sustenance. This grateful widow remembered what God had done for her.

As I have shared before, I have not always tithed, but it was because of a family of faith (just like many of you here) that I began giving 10% back to church. I assure you of this God will not be outdone in generosity. It will come back to you in many times over.

Moving from here to Parkside will not be easy. It will be tough to say "goodbye" to this place, not because of the building, the parish hall, the stained glass windows, or this facility, but because of what has been celebrated here. We have celebrated not only the life, death and

resurrection of Jesus, but we have also celebrated the life, struggles, death and resurrection of OUR lives. We have celebrated Baptisms and Confirmations, weddings and funerals, sins forgiven, bread broken and shared, all the wonderful liturgies we have celebrated here. Eucharist is central to our Catholic life. Yes, we will grieve those wonderful experiences of faith we have celebrated here...so we will attempt to ritualize our "leave taking" from this space as we move forward to Holy Spirit Parkside.

One thing we all of us can do is pray, and we need to be praying up a storm. The weekend of October 28<sup>th</sup> is a special weekend for us. It is the Kick-Off for our capital campaign. That weekend we will have 24 hours of prayer right here in church before the Blessed Sacrament. Each group or individuals can sign up in the Atrium after Mass, and I also invite every group, and individuals and families to be praying the *Spirit Is Moving Us* prayer, which we will be praying for two months after the intercessions at Mass as well as before meetings. As a parish, we are planting for future--future ministries, the future good of this faith community. What we are doing will outlive us as we build for future generations--as we realize the potential we have.

Like the dried up, seemingly dead Easter lily bulb, let us realize our potential as we become something more. Like the Samaritan leper in the Gospel today, let us express our thankfulness concretely.