

**“...; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and ...thanked him.”**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

**Once upon a time**, a Chicago high school student went to Nicaragua on summer vacation to do volunteer work. He accompanied a medical team to Wiwili, a tiny mountain village.

Life in the village was primitive. Most of the children had no clothes and were inadequately fed. The houses, built right on the dirt ground, were made from old lumber and banana leaves.

The medical team vaccinated the villagers against polio, measles, and diphtheria. Sometimes they had to turn children away because they had already gotten the disease. The high school boy found this especially heartbreaking. He wrote:

**“By the end of the first week, I started feeling sorry—even guilty—for the conditions these people lived in. I became homesick and depressed.**

*One night, I was sitting outside in the darkness. I was thinking about home, my girlfriend, and why I had even ‘volunteered’ for this wretched place.*

*I asked myself why people had to live like this. Whose fault was it? Why did God permit it?*

*Then I heard someone in the darkness. It was Jose’ Santos, the schoolteacher and the father of the family I lived with.*

*He sat down next to me, tilted his chair back against a wall, and stared up at the sky.*

*After a minute, he broke the silence, saying, ‘Isn’t it great!’*

*I questioned what he had said and he repeated, ‘Isn’t it great—all that God has given us!’*

*His eyes were still staring at the sky.*

*I tilted my head and looked up.*

*I hadn’t noticed that the sky was lit up with a million stars.*

*It was spectacular. The two of us just sat there looking up at the stars.*

*It was an experience I will never forget.*

*The next morning, I got up early to bathe.*

*Walking through the woods to the river where we washed, I stopped to look around. Everything was green. The only sounds were those of the birds and the running water.*

*Then I remembered what Jose’ had said: ‘Isn’t it great, all that God has given us!’*

*At that moment, I felt great. Everything fell into place.*

*Never before had I felt so thankful for all God had given me. Never before had I felt so...loved.*

*As we vaccinated the villagers that day, I had such a big smile on my face that my cheeks actually hurt toward the end of the afternoon.”*

*I like that story because it makes two, important points:*

**What, exactly, are the two ‘important points’ it makes, you ask.**

**Well---I am glad you asked that question!**

**1<sup>st</sup>**, it recalls the two groups of people whom Jesus talks about in today’s Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Luke: those who **are** grateful for God’s gifts to them and those who **are not**.

**2<sup>nd</sup>**, the story illustrates the point that if children grow up to be **un**grateful, it’s probably because they were never taught to **be** ...grateful.

The Chicago high school student **became** grateful ...because Jose’ Santos **taught** him to be so.

I will now take a closer look at this latter point: if children grow up to be **un**grateful, it’s probably because they were never taught to **be grateful**.

Some time ago, someone wrote a letter to Ann Landers, which contained an advertisement for United Technologies Corp. of Hartford, Connecticut. This is how the ad read:

**Someone once asked a Southerner...**  
“Where does the South actually begin?”  
The Southerner said proudly, “When you notice the children say, ‘Yes, sir’ and ‘No, ma’am.’”  
(The article goes on...)  
**But** ...good manners are not a matter of geography. There are as many polite children in Caribou, Maine, Wichita, Kansas, and Pgh., PA as there are in Natchez, Miss.  
Children don’t learn politeness from a postmark. They learn it from a parent.  
You’ll know you’ve done a good job of teaching when your child says,  
**“Thank you ...for teaching me to say, ‘Thank you.’ ”**

What that ad or article has to do with United Technologies Corp. of Hartford...I have no idea!

**BUT**, it says it all. Gratitude is something that parents must **teach** their children.

One of the best ways to teach gratitude to children is the way Jose’ Santos taught the Chicago high school student. He **shared** with him his **own reasons** for being **grateful** to God.

Here’s another example of this kind of ‘**sharing**.’

**Once upon a time**, there was a little boy by the name of Byron, who lived on a farm in Nebraska. When Byron was 8 years old, he had a pony, which was properly-named- ‘Frisky.’ One morning before school, riding ‘Frisky,’ Byron was getting the cows and suddenly the pony bolted off at breakneck speed.

Young Byron held on for dear-life...and emerged from the incident unhurt.

That night, Byron’s father accompanied him upstairs to bed and asked his son to kneel with him and thank God that he was not hurt by Frisky that day.

There, beside Byron’s bed, the two knelt, as his father prayed, out loud, a spontaneous prayer of thanksgiving to God.

That incident happened 65 years ago, **BUT** ...Byron never forgot it. It moved him deeply and gave him a greater appreciation of his father. Above all, it taught him to be grateful. And ever since, he has made ‘gratitude to God’ a regular part of his life.

\*\*\*\*\*

In conclusion, today’s Gospel invites us to ask ourselves two things.

**1<sup>st</sup>**, to which group of people do we belong? Do we belong to those who are grateful, like the Samaritan-leper, who returned? Or do we belong to those who are ungrateful, like the other nine lepers, who were healed and **didn’t** return?

**2<sup>nd</sup>**, if we are parents, are we teaching our children to be grateful to God? Or is this something we are, perhaps, overlooking in the rat race of modern, family life?

If we have overlooked it, maybe we could set a minute aside at each evening meal this week to have each family member give thanks to God for something special that happened that day?

This may not ‘fit’ our family situation. You see, what we do isn’t important. What is important is that we do something ...something that will allow us to share with our children our own gratitude to God... for his gifts to us.

I will now close with this very, brief prayer:

**“O God, you have given us so much.  
Give us one thing more—a grateful heart!”**

May Almighty God, our Abba, bless you: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen