

Reading: Luke 17:11-19

You may have heard of the two walking through a paddock unaware that a huge and very angry bull was watching them. Suddenly it started running toward them. So they began to take flight. It wasn't long into the chase that they realised that the massive bull was gaining on them. "What are we going to do?" yelled one to the other with what little breath he had left.

"I know, say a prayer."

"But I don't know any prayers."

"Just say a grace - you must know a grace."

So she intoned, "For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly grateful."

Being grateful is at the heart of what it means to be Christian. Today's Gospel is not well known. It recounts the occasion that Jesus healed 10 lepers. No one mixed with them. They lived outside the towns, usually in caves. They lived a life of total social isolation. Leprosy was a catch-all term for all sorts of skin diseases. Some of them would have simply had bad eczema. Whatever they had, Jesus reputation went before him and they sought him out. Jesus chooses a very traditional way of healing them. "Go to the priests," he says. He said this, I believe, because it heals them of not just of their skin disease but also of their social isolation. At the verification of the priest they could have returned to community. They could have rejoined their families and begun a whole new life. Ten are physically cured but only one thinks to actually return to Jesus and say thank you. I wonder what went through the others' heads.

"Oh it was a coincidence that I was cured."

"It just happened."

"I was getting better anyway."

"I'm too busy getting on with my new life to bother to thank God."

It is typical of Luke that the one who returns to say thank you is a Samaritan: a foreigner, an outcast within the outcasts. But a really interesting thing happens on his return. The other lepers are cured - physically made well. But Jesus proclaims the grateful leper as made whole. In other words his or her gratitude completes the healing process.

"This is all very cool, Nick," you say, "but what of us?" Indeed what has this got to do with our animal pet Sunday. Once, when I was visiting a couple that had just had their first longed for child, the young parents said to me, "We are so blessed to have this new child; we will always care for it." To be grateful for all the animals both working and pets and the wild things is to want to take care of them.

Very strange things happen in my job. Once when I was taking a funeral Uncle Jim, every family has an Uncle Jim, got up to give the tribute. He started coughing. This to those who knew him, was his party piece. "Sorry," he said and pulled out rubber frog out of his mouth. "Sorry," he said, "I had a frog in my throat." I said I was just pleased he wasn't a little hoarse.

Anyway- last week a frog died. Frogs die all the time but this one was different. Toughie, the world's last Mexican fringe-limbed tree frog and a symbol of the extinction crisis, died at his home in the Atlanta Botanical Garden. The famed frog's age is unknown, but he's at least 12 years old and likely older, because he was an adult when collected in 2005.

On one level this doesn't seem very important, but think on this. This is the last Mexico tree frog there will ever be. There are no more. If our children or grandchildren want to see a Mexican tree frog, then sorry, they will be dead out of luck. Every time another animal becomes extinct we are all diminished: whether it's a majestic African elephant or a Hector's dolphin or a Chatham Island robin. This amazing and diverse home that God has given us; we are slowly (and sometimes not very slowly) destroying. Even once abundant species like the common seagull are becoming fewer and fewer. Imagine a trip to the beach with no seagulls.

At the very beginning of creation God gave you and I, the human race, the task of caring for creation.

When Noah was grateful for being saved from the flood he took on the priestly task of setting up an altar and giving thanks and God blessed him and all creation.

Through us God is blessing creation when we offer our thanks for an anteater or a zebra the seeing-eye dog or the Mexican frog.

We are more than mere caretakers of creation. We are, or should be priests of creation as we give our heartfelt praise to God for all of creation.

Pet services are traditionally on the Sunday nearest St Francis Day. It wasn't so much that Francis was obsessed with animals. It was rather that he saw all of creation as a source of God's blessing. Francis was reverently in love with all of nature—sun, moon, air, water, fire, flowers; and he seemed to have power over animals. Once he asked the birds to shut up when he was preaching. He tamed a wild wolf and had a rabbit follow him around. He wrote the Canticle of Brother Moon and Sister Sun. We know it best as the hymn *All Creatures of our God and King*. Just as he was dying he added another verse about the gift of death and as he died the brothers sang it to him.

This may seem a little heavy, but we know it from our earliest days, when we sing...

*All things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful:  
The Lord God made them all.*

Listen carefully to the last verse:

*He gave us eyes to see them,  
And lips that we might tell  
How great is God Almighty,  
Who has made all things well.*

To give thanks is to care and that's exactly what we do today.