

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Several months ago, a group of Stanford graduate students, most in the medical school, moved into our parish. These eight men are very faithful Catholics. They commit each day to a Holy Hour and are men of deep prayer. Once a month I join them for Mass and dinner and our time together confirms that the grace and power of the Holy Spirit is truly alive in the most surprising ways at times. Our Stanford brothers pray each day for our St. Pius X parish community, and I know their prayers are working!!

Two of these men, Deep and Brandon, volunteer each Sunday at the Missionaries of Charity ministry for homeless women and men in Pacifica. They asked if we would be willing to host a group of clients for a lunch here at St. Pius X. We hosted the lunch this past Saturday. The Stanford men prepared an amazing lunch for our guests. I joined them for lunch and was so moved by the kindness and respect shown the guests who were driven from Pacifica. At first, I have to admit that I was uneasy. I planned on saying grace and heading off. I was compelled to stay until the very end because of the example set by our Stanford brothers. One guest did not have a bible so I gave him one. Others were fascinated by our library in the Parish Center so they were invited to take as many books as they wanted. It was truly an experience of “amazing grace.”

I wanted to share this particular story in light of Respect Life Month in the dioceses of the United States. While we unceasingly strive to respect others in light of the Gospel imperative, we take time in this particular way to draw attention - through prayer, dialogue, and reflection - to our call to respect all human life, from conception to natural death. The incredible kindness shown by these Stanford brothers is a tangible sign of respect for members of our society who are so often marginalized and kept on the periphery. As I heard the histories of our lunch guests, I was reminded that they are human beings down on their luck, struggling to survive amidst circumstances and challenges I cannot begin to imagine.

Today’s readings provide an intersection between respect and dignity for others and gratitude and thanksgiving. In the Book of Kings, we read about Naaman being cured of leprosy. When healings take place, we pray the response is one of thanksgiving and gratitude. Naaman was renewed in body, soul and spirit and thus wanted to express his thanks to Elisha. “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant.” This response of gratitude is also expressed in Luke’s Gospel. Jesus cured ten lepers; yet, only one returns to express thanksgiving and heartfelt gratitude. “And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan.” Of the nine who were cured, it was the social and religious outcast and pariah, the Samaritan, who returns to give thanks.

How often do I - do we - take the time to say thanks to Our Lord for all of the healings taking place in our lives? How often do we pray before the Blessed Sacrament in gratitude for all the love and mercy God continually imparts on us? I encourage all of us to take some time to say “thank you.” It is a very powerful sign of respect, humility, and gratitude.

Fr. Tom