

The Advantages of Being ‘Samaritan’
Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity
(From the Gospel: *St. Luke 17:11 ff.*)

King James Version: **11** *And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: 13 And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. 14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. 17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? 18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. 19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.*

New International Version: **11** *Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance 13 and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" 14 When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. 15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him--and he was a Samaritan. 17 Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" 19 Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."*

Today's Gospel highlights two kinds of people with two kinds of attitudes. We have the chosen, favored people, the Jews. And we have a Samaritan.

We encountered these two groups in last Sunday's Gospel, when the Lord presented the parable of the "Good Samaritan". In both instances --one a story, and the other an actual event-- we observe very two, distinctive forms of behavior. The Good Samaritan, as we saw, went to the greatest extent of his ability to demonstrate the ancient law to "love one's neighbor as oneself". His love for a complete stranger is contrasted with the actions of two Jewish men who were supposed to be holy: a Levite, and a priest, who completely ignored the needs of their countryman who had been wounded and left for dead by robbers.

We have been introduced to these amazing Samaritans elsewhere. In St. John chapter 4 there is a remarkable story about the Samaritan woman at the well, who in a chance encounter with Christ had the temerity not only to break the taboos between men and women, but also between two alienated races, Jews and Samaritans. She fearlessly questioned the Savior about a variety of theological questions, and having been convinced by His replies, ran off to proclaim her new faith to her countrymen. Persuaded, they eagerly follow her lead. Scripture says: *Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in [Jesus] because of the woman's testimony...And because of His words many more became believers (4:39, 41).*

Today we read of a miraculous healing. All of the ten recipients of the healing were lepers. Because of their disease, they were social outcasts, obligated to live separately from others,

and strictly shunned. Curiously, their leprous condition had thrown Jew and Samaritan together into one class of diseased, ceremonially unclean sufferers. But following the healing, it is only the Samaritan, doubly the underdog by reason of race as well as illness, who returns to Jesus to give thanks. Humbling himself in gratitude at Christ's feet, he alone of the ten receives another blessing: a personal commendation from the Lord Himself.

Because of these accounts, I find myself asking the question: what exactly is it about these Samaritans that makes them so wonderful. Surely the answer is not in any outward possession or status. They were hated by the Jews as a half-breed people foisted upon the Jews by their Babylonian overlords several centuries previously, after the conquering of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar. Once most of the Jews had been forcibly deported, their lands, homes, and country were given to peoples deliberately brought in by the Babylonians to take their place to maintain the land. They were like the despised "scabs" of the modern labor union battles, who take jobs left by strikers on the picket-lines. Following the end of the Jewish captivity, these imported people, who intermixed in marriage with the few Jews left behind, became the forbears of the Samaritans of Jesus' day. There was no love lost between these two groups!

But look at where we find them in connection with Jesus: extolled in the Gospels in an example of profound obedience to God's Law (the "Good Samaritan"); returning to Christ to gratefully thank Him for a healing (today's Gospel); and engaging Christ with earnest, eager questions, showing faith that led to the conversion of many others (John 4).

From all of these accounts, we must conclude of the Samaritans that in spite of their social status, they demonstrated an innocence, a guilelessness, eagerness to learn, and most of all, humility, that gave them an eminent access to Christ that at times vastly exceeded that of His own covenant people. Why? Let's consider it.

What had they to lose? They had no pride of race or position. As second class citizens there was no higher court to which they could appeal for the assertion of their rights. They had no rights to assert. They possessed no written, contractual relationship with God to which they could refer. They had no history or tradition to which they could sentimentally invoke to buttress their self-image. They had no cultural or religious 'capital' to do business with God or man. Circumstance had reduced them to the "essentials": dependence upon nothing other than the good graces of others. If they were hated and scorned, then they were hated and scorned. If they were loved, accepted, and extolled, then so it was.

I find in the Samaritans a profound example both for my own place as a sinner before a Holy God, and as a sinner before other sinners. What can I possibly bring to the Cross of Christ other than my essential self? Does it matter, for example, if I'm really a rather nice sinner, rather than a particularly nasty and vicious one? Is there anything whatsoever about myself that will

serve to recommend me to Him? Does my personality, likeableness, education, appearance, pedigree, assist me when I come before Him? Will a personal recommendation help me out? Perhaps the number of years I've attended church will serve me well. Or maybe my membership in Traditional Anglicanism. No, none of these will work...:

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... (Romans 3:23)
As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one... (3:10)

I must conclude that it would be the very best thing for me to accept joyfully every humbling circumstance in my life that tends to deprive me of that persistent impulse that I must enter God's presence with something in hand to give Him. I must be like those who face the devastating scrutiny of security clearances: before I even enter that building wherein God is enthroned, I am stripped of personal possessions and subjected to the humiliation of frisking and X-ray examination. If the heavenly metal-detector picks up the gleam of even one coin of presumptuous self-righteousness, I am denied admission. Standing in the corner with other rejects, I will have to watch with envy as those who, shorn of pride and emptied of self-confidence by the miseries and difficulties with which life has afflicted them, gladly and freely pass through the gate with nary a pause!

And what can I bring to my interaction with men? A college degree in "Human Relations"? My professional success story? The vast reach of my life experiences; the multiplied different kinds of people I've met and interrelated with; the many places I've travelled to? Or even a list of the struggles, sorrows, and trials I've endured? No, I must enter their presence with nothing other than...*love*:

Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another, for the one who loves someone else has fulfilled the law. (13:8)

It is the Samaritan-at-heart who is marched rapidly and happily into the presence of both men and God. Like the woman at the well, he unselfconsciously converses with the Lord of all Creation, and gets ready answers from His lips. He feels no condemnation in His presence, once he has confessed his sins. He is anxious and eager to give up his own presuppositions in favor of receiving life-giving truth. And, as in today's Gospel, he doesn't waste a moment running back to Christ, drop on his knees, and give humble thanks. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind...* (Matthew 22:37) is all he knows.

And when it comes to his fellow man, like the Good Samaritan, he focuses only on setting himself aside for the purpose of serving the needs of another. He allows nothing to stand in the way of obeying that commandment which tells him: *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* (Matt. 22:39).

It is the Samaritan who has learned the very highest of all truths: *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets* (22:40).

“Lord, grant that I might indeed become a Samaritan at heart.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.