

By Father Charles Bowes

2 Kings 5:14-17
2 Timothy 2:8-13
Luke 17:11-19

The life we live in Jesus is more than physical and altogether new.

“Your faith has saved you,” Jesus says to the leper who returns in Luke chapter 17. By these words the man’s faith is not simply the belief that he would be cured, since all the others were also healed. Rather, by returning, his faith is shown to be one that can perceive what really is at stake...it is a faith which sees beneath the surfaces of life. It is a faith deeper than any of the so-called “believers” – Jesus’ Jewish kindred.

This man was a foreigner...and not just any foreigner. A Samaritan, a religious outcast. A stranger. Their common illness had made these lepers a united body. Once one is unclean, it doesn’t seem to matter whether you are Jew or a Samaritan. Lepers formed a new citizenry, the unwanted. And so this little band of ten wanders together until they encounter Jesus. But what happens after the healing? Things revert to type. The Jews regain the prestige of their identity, and the Samaritan becomes an intruder once more – still a stranger, a foreigner, a religious outcast – but this time

with a difference: he sees with eyes of faith – faith deeper than those of his friends. The only place he may ever have known true dignity and liberty is in the presence of Jesus. Is it any wonder he returns to give thanks? And is it surprising that those who benefit from worldly freedoms choose to celebrate them rather than be thankful for the suspension of prestige found in Jesus Christ – Jew or Gentile, man or woman, slave or free – we so love those distinctions when we’re healthy. When things are going well, we sure don’t need God.

“Where are the others?” Jesus asks. Of course he knew where they were. The Italian priest Luigi Santucci tries to imagine what the others were doing after their healing. He pictures three at an inn drinking to Jesus’ health. Another is with a prostitute. “When you gave me back my mouth, my hands and my body, what was it for but this?” he asks. One is in the middle of a robbery he spent his idle years planning. Another is doing a business deal and others were too proud or too bowled over to remember Jesus. One had returned to his leprous lover and taken up the disease again. All nine, suggests Santucci, had picked up their life where they’d left off. Only one was willing to take the risk to break with the past, to return to Jesus on the Jerusalem

road, kneeling “with his lips to the rock.” For the rest it was as if nothing had happened at all – life resumed where it had left off.

The Samaritan came back, and Jesus said, “Stand up, go on your way, your faith has saved you.” Not his skin, but him; not the surface, but his heart, not his epidermis, but his mind – he really followed Jesus. Number ten came back. He did not return to his old life and his old world. He lived a new life in Jesus.

On the surface, our lives may look very much the same – but each time we pray – each time we say our Amen to “the body of Christ” – we are healed anew. And so we give thanks each time we gather – we thank well, which is the meaning of Eucharist. And this weekly effort gradually makes the play actor into the true believer. We go through the motions of faith and unity so we do indeed become faith-filled and one. And so we pray: “We give you thanks, Almighty God, for these and all the gifts we have received from your bounty through Christ Our Lord. Amen.”

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