

28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)  
October 12 & 13, 2013

All Saints Church  
Rev. Andrew Szebenyi, SJ

### The Grateful Samaritan

My dear Brothers and Sisters.

Whenever we read a passage from the Scriptures, we may respond to it contemplatively, as we visualize the event, and that way we become part of it and learn from it. Such personal experience brings its good fruits. Another way is to consider the meaning of the described events in their historical context. It is not a good practice to read an ancient writing as if it has been written recently, in our time, in our century. What is needed is to go back in time, and understand the culture of the time in order to find the true meaning of a statement or that of an event. Then what we have to do is to bring this meaning back into our time and culture, and express it in the way we think and speak today. This is known as good scriptural scholarship.

So, my Sisters and Brothers, this is the story: Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem walked through Samaria and Galilee, where he met ten lepers and healed them. But he did not heal them immediately. First he told them to go and show themselves to the priest. As they went they realized that they have been healed. One of them turned around, came back to Jesus to thank him and to give praise to God. He was a Samaritan. Jesus pointed out this to the people around him, and he said to the man, "Stand up and go, your faith has saved you."

My Sisters and Brothers, consider for a moment what happened here between Jesus and the ten lepers in the narrative's historical context. We find here all the colors and the shadows of a transition from the old covenant to the new.

First, we should know that in Jesus' time the historians, writing in Judea, saw Samaria as a sinful kingdom, divinely punished for its idolatry. According to them, the only place of true worship was Jerusalem. But that was only one side of the coin. According to the other side, the Samaritans had their own temple on Mount Gerizim and claimed that, actually, that was the original sanctuary, and not the one in Jerusalem. Both Jewish and Samaritan religious leaders taught that it was wrong to have any contact with the opposite group, and neither was to speak to one another, or even to enter each other's territories.

Second, Jesus sent the ten lepers to show themselves to the priest. This was according to the law of the covenant. A priest in Jesus time was a person, specially consecrated to perform the task of sacrifice for sins, for favors, for healing, for worship. So, what Jesus has done, was according to the law of the old covenant.

But there is also a transition here, from the old to the new. First Jesus not only enters the Samaritan territory, but speaks to the Samaritan, and what is more, he also heals him, and then he places him before the others as an example of true worship. Where are the other nine? Jesus asked. "Has no one but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God? "Go, your faith has saved you". These words of Jesus reflect the Spirit of the New Covenant, the Spirit of the Kingdom of God, where we are all God's children.

My Brothers and Sisters, much has been changed in two thousand years. I have in my room, hanging from the ceiling, a pyramid made of blue paper, blue like the sky. It is constructed of four equilateral triangles, three on the sides, and one as the base. On each side a word is written: *Health, Friendship, New Life*. On the base the word *Gratitude* is written. The thin thread which hold the pyramid twists and turns, showing one or the other words, but the base that has Gratitude written on it, is seen all the time.

The meaning of the word "Samaritan" has also changed. Today, if you Google the word "Samaritan" on your computer, you get about 14,300,000 entries (of course in 0.29 seconds). Taking a random sample of 100, I found that 94 were about shelters, hospitals, health care and the like, according to the image of the good Samaritan. As Jesus said: The Kingdom of God is at hand. Amen.