

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Happy Thanksgiving! It is my pleasure to worship with you this morning. Today is a day set aside to give thanks – to count our blessings and cultivate gratitude. That’s not so easy this year when many are suffering because of the COVID-19 coronavirus or its effects on our economy. We have to pull back to get some perspective on our lives. We have to dig deep to acknowledge all the gifts we’ve been given despite our losses in 2020. Fortunately, we can appeal to the Holy Spirit to give us the vision we need.

How appropriate that our gospel reading today is about a man who demonstrates his thanks to Jesus for the miracle of being healed. This man is the only one out of a group of ten healed lepers who returns. This man wants Jesus to know how grateful he is. He recognizes the magnitude of what Jesus has done for him.

When the healed man throws himself down at Jesus’ feet, he shows his humility as well as his gratitude. He humbles himself before Jesus and shouts praise to God, whose power and mercy were manifested through Jesus.

I believe that today, we Christians are called to be humble as well as grateful. If we follow the example of the healed leper, we will acknowledge

how great and generous God is. We will get beyond our egos to comprehend that we are not the masters of our own lives. Instead, we depend upon God, who is pleased to provide for us.

In the first reading we heard from Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Israelites, “When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied...then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt...Do not say to yourself, ‘My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth...”

It can be easy to think that we are in charge, especially when things go well for us. But, Moses warns us not to deceive ourselves. We are not the powerful ones. In good times and bad, we belong to God and our lives are in His hands. Humility is what God desires from us.

But, I think today’s gospel offers us an even deeper message. Why does Jesus draw attention to the fact that the man who returns to give thanks is a foreigner – a Samaritan? Why is that important? To answer these questions, we must first look at the relations between Jews and Samaritans in Jesus’ day.

Samaritans lived primarily in Samaria, the region situated between Judea (where Jerusalem was) and Galilee (where Jesus lived and conducted most of his ministry). Despite being geographically close, Jews and Samaritans despised each other. Violent confrontations between them were numerous.

Jews and Samaritans both claimed to be the true guardians of their common tradition – the Law of Moses. Samaritans traced their lineage back to the old Northern Kingdom of Israel that had been taken captive by the Assyrian nation more than 700 years before Jesus was born.

Samaritans had established their own temple and had their own version of the first five books of the Bible. They believed that the Jews were some kind of splinter group that had strayed from the true faith.

According to Jews, Samaritans were probably the offspring of Israelites who had forsaken their traditions and intermarried with foreigners. They were not legitimate and were not to be trusted. Both Jewish and Samaritan leaders taught that it was wrong to have any contact with the opposing group. They were not to enter each other's territories or even speak to each other.

Yet, in our gospel, Jesus did not skirt Samaritan territory – he went through it on his way to Jerusalem. He did not ask the lepers who called

out to him whether any of them were Samaritans. He responded with blessing and healing for all ten – Samaritan or not. Jesus was willing to move past the boundary that separated Jews from Samaritans. He reached out to do good for people who were not of his tribe because he valued and loved all human beings.

It's not surprising then that the Samaritan leper was the one most impressed with what Jesus had done. This man would never have expected a Jew to heal him. He recognized more than the others that it could only be God Almighty who empowered Jesus. Why else would Jesus have done such a groundbreaking thing? The Samaritan leper's gratitude was great.

If Jesus' example has meaning for us, I suggest that we examine ourselves and determine who the Samaritans are in our own lives. Who are the "others" – the ones we do not respect or trust? How should we be treating them?

As I thought about the relations between Jews and Samaritans, I could not help but think about the two warring political parties in our country these days. We citizens of America seem to have divided into two tribes who don't just disagree about public policies. Democrats and Republicans deeply distrust each other, question each other's motives, and attach each

other's character. Each party believes that the other party's ideas are dangerously wrong and that the other party does nothing but lie. Like the Jews and Samaritans, each party believes that it alone speaks the truth. In short, Republicans and Democrats appear to despise each other.

As Christians, we cannot just accept this mindset. Today's gospel directs us to reach out to members of the other tribe, to respect them as fellow Americans and to do good for them. Perhaps the good we can do is to listen humbly – to look beyond our prejudice. We could focus on common values and discuss our differences calmly. We could stop calling each other names and writing each other off as stupid or evil.

What I am suggesting would not be easy. Reaching out carries risk, but isn't this what Jesus would have us do? This would be a good way for us to express our thanks to God for all the gifts we have received.

In our second reading today, St. Paul says, "You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity." Let us be generous. Today, I ask the Lord Jesus to give us the faith, the courage, and most of all the humility to reach out to those who are not members of our tribe, wherever we may find them. May the Holy Spirit guide us.

Amen