

*Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine?*

The Samaritans, one of whom is mentioned in today's Gospel, lived in the region between Galilee (Jesus' home province) and Jerusalem (Judah). They were descendants of the ancient patriarch Joseph and rivals of their Jewish cousins since way back to the times of Solomon. But they were also a mixture, hybrids.

For when their kingdom was sacked by the Assyrians in 722 BC, much of their population was transported into exile (to become the "ten lost tribes of Israel") (of whom some Irish claim to be one!) while the Assyrians forced pagan peoples of the Middle East to fill up the vacant villages and lands left behind. Hence true Jews questioned the purity of later Samaritans – a small number of whom survive today in modern Israel and the West Bank.

It's interesting that Samaritans get noticeable mention in the New Testament. Jesus is even accused of being a Samaritan by his enemies (he does not deny it). Then there is that wonderful parable about the Good Samaritan. In John's Gospel we have that profound conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well – right smack in the center of Samaritan territory. The distance between the two is made clear in the remark of the woman, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" Then there is the Samaritan leper in today's Gospel who returns to thank Jesus for his cure.

Further on, the *Acts of the Apostles* tells of the deacon Philip's conversion of many Samaritans not long after Pentecost; how *unclean spirits crying out in a loud voice, came out of many possessed people, and many paralyzed and crippled people were cured.* [and] *There was great joy in that city.*

But enough about demographics! Today's Gospel is about more than a contrast between the cured Jewish lepers (no show of gratitude) and the Samaritan (thankful to an extreme).

May the story not – on a deeper level – depict the contrast between people who are baptized (cured of what ails them, however you may describe it) but who fail to grow beyond the fundamentals of their faith; and the odd one who is not just baptized but becomes intensely grateful for all that the Gospel offers him, probes its stories, ponders the words of Christ, extends his baptism to include a plunge into the writings of St. Paul – studies, for example, the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke to discover the deeper meanings that linger beneath their surface episodes like some vast coral reef loaded with unexpected beauty and life?

The nine who were cured are likely to forget the Christ who healed them – whereas the story's Samaritan, who remains intensely curious about Christ, returns "glorifying God *in a loud voice* and fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked (*euchariston*) him" – which could be translated: went to Mass with enthusiasm, joy, a deeper sense of

who and what Christ is and how much more he has to offer – inexhaustibly - to widen and deepen his consciousness – and ours.