

Are you a Samaritan?

Scholars will tell you that Samaritans in the days of Jesus were a somewhat hybrid community living north of Jerusalem. Their ancestors were the poorer Israelites of the northern regions of Israel who were left behind when their more marketable kinsmen were carried off to distant realms by the Assyrian Empire centuries before. Because of alien influences that “contaminated” their Mosaic faith, they were looked down upon by orthodox Jews associated with the Temple of Jerusalem. And yet whenever a Samaritan is mentioned in the Gospels – it’s always positive. As in today’s Gospel, the Samaritan is the only one among the ten cured lepers that returns to thank Jesus for his cure. And then there is that famous Good Samaritan of the parable. And then again there is that Samaritan woman in John’s Gospel, whom Jesus encounters by the well of Jacob – in Samaritan territory.

Read yourself into that latter incident, since it was preserved not just to tell us about then but about now and you! You have come to a well to draw water, actually stagnant water. You are doing this every day, drawing on whatever can refresh your will and need to live, to make ends meet, to choose among options “right or wrong” – like a trapeze artist swinging from one grasped demand to another – life at risk.

And then this stranger interrupts your routine - to ask for a drink! And having learned to take care of yourself and your dependents as demanding enough, you bridle at his intrusion. Where does he get off, being so familiar? And the stranger says: *If you only knew the depths from which I arise, what a well and wealth of refreshment I can be, besparkled with life and wisdom and peace, you’d be asking me for a drink that will never leave you thirsty, insatiable yet always refreshed!* Naturally you doubt something so fantastic. You try to deconstruct his offer by way of common sense, like: *Sir you have no bucket, this well is deep, such a promise is beyond anything rational, you don’t know how complicated my life is . . .*

But here’s the clincher. The stranger says: *Everyone who drinks this standing water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in her a spring of water welling up to eternal life.* To become a wellspring – not just a frequenter of the inconsistent offerings of everydayness, the same old-same old, - but to become yourself! a wellspring, a source of life, refreshment, deeply linked to the Source of all things great and small!

What will you want to do but run off (as I have been doing in my old age) to tell everybody (by way of an essay, a conversation) what the event of Christ really means – that each of us liturgically can become the Real Presence of the Eucharist, as when you consume the host it is you who are consumed – primed with grace, no longer at a distance from the holy of holies but “appropriated, occupied, owned, taken over” by what we call God – become prophets, reflective of old Moses’s wish: *Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets* (i.e. poets).

Geoff Wood