

1] When I was young I would often hear people, in all sorts of situations, use the expression, 'Who do you think I am: Lobby Lud?' The fictional character, Lobby Lud, was invented in 1927 by an old and now defunct newspaper called, The Westminster Gazette. A newspaper reporter would give a description of a seaside town and of a person they happened to meet, whom they named Lobby Lud. Readers had to guess the name of the town and the person described. Also, anyone carrying a copy of the Westminster Gazette could try to find the Lobby Lud character and claim a five pound prize. That is about £320 in today's money. Other newspapers took up the idea of Lobby Lud in various forms, including the Daily Mail, so that, eventually, this fictional character became a symbol for any anonymous, nondescript person; an 'anybody' who could be taken for somebody.

2] The same holds true for this group of Lepers who approach our Lord in today's gospel. Their common disease lumps them together into an anonymous bundle of people; faceless individuals who might be anybody. But that might be true of anyone, really: we ourselves might be classified, identified, compartmentalised, namelessly put into a box and defined by our social standing, our politics, our opinions, our tastes, our illnesses, whatever it might be.

3] But one thing holds true of these ten lepers who exist on the fringes of a village in ancient Palestine, in the region between Samaria and Galilee. Unlike the newspaper readers seeking the elusive Lobby Lud, it seems that they think they recognise the true Messiah when He was among them, or at the very least, they have heard of His reputation as a healer of illnesses and they presume that this is He. And the prize is their liberation;

their faith restores the fulness of their humanity and they can return to the communities to which they once belonged.

4] There are, though, many features of this incident that might grab our attention and warrant further investigation. We might notice, for example, how a common sickness creates a community of fellow-sufferers that, here, dispenses with the old racial antipathy between Jews and a lone Samaritan. Indeed, we know, that under the skin we all share the same human nature; that essence created in the image and likeness of God, no matter how distorted by sin and the passions, and how bereft of that similitude of the Divine glory.

5] We might wonder, also, over Our Lord's surprise that only one returned to give Him thanks, when the other nine obeyed exactly, and did what He had told them to do. According to the Book of Leviticus (13 &14), they had to be inspected by the priests to see if they were truly cured, and then might return to their families and normal society. To the lone Samaritan, of course, this was something he could not do with the other nine, having no part in Israel, worshipping on Mount Gerazim, rather than on Mount Sion.

6] When they first see Christ they address Him as, Jesus, Master! They do not call Him the Messiah, or Son of David or any other provocative title. In the Greek the word translated here as master, is epistata, literally meaning, one-who-is-set-over or, one-put-in-charge. St Luke often uses the term instead of Rabbi or teacher. So it is that, obedient to this teacher, they depart immediately, being cured on the way.

7] It is as if these nine represent those in Israel who abide by the old dispensation, belonging still to the Old Testament, who praised God for His the mighty acts and remained fixed in the former rites and sacrifices, traditions and commandments. But as Christ would tell Photini, the Samaritan woman at the well,

‘Believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father... But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.’ [Jn.4:21-23]

8] It might appear at first that this story is just a lesson in gratitude; that thanks are due not only to God and His healing power, but also to the one through whom that healing comes on earth. We might be grateful for the memory of one who develops a drug that cures a disease, but we would also thank the doctor who administers the prescription. But there is more to this incident than just good manners. It is the Samaritan, the unexpected one, who returns and falls prostrate in thanksgiving at Our Lord’s feet.

9] The other nine have returned to where they came from; they disappear, back into the pages of the Old Testament. Healed in body alone, ritually cleansed on the level of this world, alone: in perfect accord with the faith of Israel, that prefigured that which was to come in Christ. The same is seen in the old sacrifices that could only bring temporary purification from sins: they were to be superseded by the self-offering of Christ Himself for eternal salvation and the renewal of our humanity. As St Paul says in the epistle to the Hebrews, ‘For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.’ [Heb.10:1-2]

10] But the Samaritan has uncovered the promised Christ. He has no need to claim his prize like those newspaper readers of old; he is already on his way to the new life. The evangelist includes this story, no doubt, with an eye to those, the gentiles

like us, who would turn to Christ. There were those in Israel who recognised the Christ when He came, and there were many Jews in the diaspora who were the founder-members of churches around that ancient Mediterranean world. But St Luke in his gospel, has a special concern to reveal Our Lord as having a heart that cares for the poor, the outcast, the downtrodden, the rejected, the outsiders, be they Samaritans or gentiles.

11] Thus we stand in Christ: the wild olive branches, grafted in, to use the Pauline analogy (Rom.11:17). We who in our fallen nature were leprous with sin, have been made one with Christ and have partaken of His sacrifice, for when we were baptised into Christ, we were baptised into His death. And we have put on Christ (cf. Rom.:6:3ff) to uncover, once more, the image of God within us, and to set us free, that we might strive to recover the likeness of God. Which is why, since the earliest days, the newly baptised have been dressed in new clothes, manifesting figuratively, that new life in Christ.

12] Thus we stand in Christ: where, as St Paul tells the Colossians today, 'There cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all. Where we have put to death what is earthly in us, putting off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.

13] And thus we stand in Christ: for each time that we partake worthily of the Holy Gifts, we share in that eternal communion sacrifice that is ever offered for our purification in the heavens. And, moreover, we must return, again and again whilst in this life, to offer our holy Eucharist, our prayer of thanksgiving to God the Father, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, who consecrates our offering of bread and wine here on earth, that it might be conformable to that glorious ascended body of Christ in

the heavens: that receiving the same, we too might be for ever healed and cleansed and preserved in eternal life.