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Jesus is with us now and every moment

Thomas Gumbleton | Oct. 18, 2013 The Peace Pulpit

When we hear this Gospel lesson, I'm sure all of us immediately ask ourselves, "Am I like those nine? Most of the time, do I forget to thank God? Always asking God, but not thanking God?" That's an important part of the message of this morning's Scriptures. But if we listen really deeply to all three of our lessons today, there's an even more profound understanding about God that we will come to, and about Jesus.

We have to go back to the first lesson to begin to put all of this into context. The incident in the first lesson is unusual. This pagan from outside is finally convinced that the Hebrew prophet Elisha might have something worthwhile to provide for him, and after going back and forth in conversation, he finally agrees, yes, he will go wash in the Jordan River, although, as he says, "There are many rivers in Syria where I can go and wash. Why bother with this tiny river here?" But he does it finally, and he is cleansed.

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
2 Kings 5:14-17
Psalms 98:1, 2-3, 3-4
2 Timothy 2:9-13
Luke 17:11-19
Full text of the readings

Then he goes back to the prophet, and he cries out to him, "Now I know there is no other God anywhere in the world, but in Israel!" He recognizes the God of the chosen people as the God of all; and then he does something strange. He says to Elisha, "Let me take two bags of soil, enough that a mule could carry back to my own land." [1]

Well, why would he do that? Well, because in the Middle East, or near east at that time, and throughout the world, as far as religion was concerned, people always worshipped a local god -- a god who was, for them, alone. Now this man has this insight: No, there is a universal God. It's the God of the Jews, a God who is God of all, and so he wants to take the soil back with him so that, in his own land, he can still worship this God of Israel.

Now, that idea of God being connected with a certain place comes up in the Gospel lesson. We might not recognize it at first, but after Jesus has told the 10 lepers, "Go and see the priests to be certified that you are cleansed," that was the law in the book of Leviticus. The priests had to certify that anyone with this kind of contagious disease could now re-enter the community, and so, as they were going back -- all of them -- they were going from Galilee and they would have to pass through Samaria and then to Jerusalem to find the priests at the temple.

We don't know it as we're reading the lesson, but as they're walking along, the one Samaritan must have been saying to himself, "Where shall I show myself to the priests?" because Samaritans didn't worship in Jerusalem, of course. They were a hated sect, a heretical sect, and so they didn't worship. Should he go to the priests in Jerusalem or go to the temple at Garasene, where he would ordinarily worship?

But then they're cured, and the man gets an extraordinary insight: "No, God is not at Jerusalem or at Garasene -- God is in Jesus." That's how they're cured, and so he has this tremendous insight: God is present in our world in Jesus -- a human, one like us in every way, but this is God. So he has that insight and he goes back, and not only thanks God in Jesus, but falls and worships Jesus, who he recognizes as God.

The words that Luke uses in describing this when he says, "The man went back to give thanks," is a Greek word used only to give thanks and praise to God. So Luke is reminding us once more, and trying to deepen our faith in the realization, [that] God is present in Jesus. God is entered into our human history, become one like us in

every way, to be with us on our journey through life, to show us how to live according to God's ways; Jesus is God.

That's a tremendous truth that we have to reinforce within ourselves, come to understand more deeply: God is present in Jesus. Jesus is God. We might think, "Well yes, this is good for that Samaritan. He can go back to Jesus -- worship, thank." Well, so can we. As St. Paul reminds Timothy, "Jesus is now risen from the dead and Jesus lives among us." So it's important for us to realize this once more. It's the great truth we celebrate at Easter: Jesus has gone through death to new life. The son of God is present even now in our world.

Where do we go to worship Jesus and to give thanks? Well, we come here to the Eucharist, where Jesus, through our rituals, his life, death and resurrection, is made present on our altar where we can worship Jesus, thank Jesus, pray to Jesus. But Jesus is also present in every one of us, so when we interact with one another, if we're aware of the son of God living in our midst -- "Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there" -- Jesus is with us now and every moment.

It's important for us then to remind ourselves, as we're always quick to do, "I don't want to be one of those nine who doesn't remember to thank Jesus. I need to thank Jesus," and not just once in a while for this blessing or that blessing, which we receive constantly, but in a more profound way: to be aware that every moment, every moment of our life, is a gift from God because God has loved us into being. We wouldn't be present; there would be no world if God hadn't loved it into existence.

We have a profound, immeasurable debt to pay to God in gratitude -- in adoration, in praise -- because God is always there to be gracious to us. God is always loving us, always bringing us to a deeper fullness of life. "Go then, find me in the fullness of life with God in heaven."

So this morning as we celebrate this Eucharist, I hope we can be more aware that God is in our midst in Jesus and that we can worship God and thank God here at this Eucharist, but also every moment of every day in our life, as we think of it as a gift from God. We want to offer praise and thanks to the God who loves us -- continues to love us at every instant -- and prepares us for the fullness of life in heaven.

[Homily given at St. Hilary Parish, Redford, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. Sign up here [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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