

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost +

The passage from the Gospel of John should be familiar to all of us. And not simply from a man holding a poster at sporting events. We recite it each time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist as part of the comfortable words. It is a proclamation of the universal nature of Salvation for all those who believe in the Son the God.

As comfortable words they are indeed comforting, but applying the theological principle of Universal Salvation to all those who believe can be difficult for human beings to either to appreciate or embrace. Part of our human nature, our distorted human nature, wants to believe that we are different and unique. Our family, friends, our church is special, it is **The Church**. The parishioners are the people of God and we have it right!

The Lesson of the Gospel today reminds us of two facts. First, if we believe in the Son of God and place our faith Him we are doing what is right and proper. He is the source of light and life, in this world and in the World to Come. The Second lesson is a bit harder for us to comprehend. It was difficult in Jesus' time and it is no different for us to day.

The second fact is that God sent His Son into the world to save and set free from sin all who would believe in Him..... All who would believe in Him.....not just those we like, or identify with, but everyone who believes. Jesus died even those who belong to churches that have rock bands instead of pipe organs.

What do we read in the Gospel today that would make us consider this difficult to embrace or understand theological principle of Universal Salvation?

Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the Jewish Capital, the city of David, the Holy City. (The place to be if you are one of God's People) He is traveling in an area that is generally not the place to be if you are one of the chosen people. That is not to say that Jews are not to be found in Galilee or Samaria, they are, but they are not there by choice, because if they live there they have to associate with those other people.

In Galilee there are those who are Greek, Roman and other Semitic peoples. The Samaritans are those who follow the Jewish Faith, but did not go into exile with the Jewish Nation when they were carried off to Babylon. The Jews do not like the Samaritans, because they did not suffer the exile. The Samaritans do not believe the Jews are true to the faith, because during the Babylonian exile the synagogue worship begins and the temple lost some of its importance to the Hebrew people.

Jesus is traveling between Galilee and Samaria, the bad part of town, the wrong side of the Rail Road tracks. He enters a village and ten lepers cry out to him. They are standing afar off, we are told, which was proper under the Law of Moses. The number ten is significant because it is a perfect number. We are to understand that this event will reveal something of the perfect nature of Jesus to us.

At this point we do not know if the ten are Jews, Gentiles or Samaritans. Jesus commands them to go and show themselves to the priests. This was also according to the Law of Moses, Those who had any skin disease were to present themselves to the priests to be judged if they had leprosy or not. Those who were judged to be lepers would be excluded from the community. They listen to Jesus and begin to go to the priests, but then this ritual action of the Law of Moses is astoundingly transformed. In listening to Jesus and following His instructions, they are cleansed.

In the midst of this unsuitable country, filled with foreigners, Samaritans and pagans of all description, a miracle occurs. The miraculous healing is not because of the geography, the people that are present or the religious affiliations, but because the ten believed in the Son of God and did what he told them to do. In believing and following His instructions they are saved and set free of their disease.

The record of the event continues. It is just as if we did not get the point; the example is again presented to us. One (Another perfect number) returns and offers praise and thanksgiving to Jesus. It is at this time that we learn that the one who returned was a Samaritan. (One of the unacceptable people to the Hebrews) And Jesus asks, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?" Clearly we are to understand that this man, this Samaritan is to be for us a model of discipleship. He believed, he was cleansed and he returned to offer praise and thanksgiving. Jesus sends him on his way with these beautiful words.

"Rise and go on your way; your faith has made you well"

So what are we to do?

First, we are to place our faith in Jesus; for he is our salvation our life and our resurrection.

Second, we are to remember where we find Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark we read these words recorded from the mouth of an Angel at the Resurrection: *"And he said to them, "Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you."*

Mark 16:6-7

Jesus is always going to be in the unexpected moments and in the unlikely places. But we know we will find Him and He will be with us when we go to Galilee, when we go into the mission field. When we proclaim Him and Minister in His name

Finally, we are to reject all of the prejudice in our hearts and minds. Prejudice takes many forms and has many manifestations, but the worst is between those who call upon the Name of Jesus. The prejudice between Christian Communities is an abomination.

All who believe in Jesus, all who struggle to walk in His way, and all who read and believe God's Holy Word are brothers. Children of the Same God and Father, no matter how they worship or what songs of praise they sing.....

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Now, "Rise and go on your way; your faith has made you well"