

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—C

Reading 1

Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Moses said to the people:

"If only you would heed the voice of the LORD, your God,
and keep his commandments and statutes
that are written in this book of the law,
when you return to the LORD, your God,
with all your heart and all your soul.

"For this command that I enjoin on you today
is not too mysterious and remote for you.
It is not up in the sky, that you should say,
'Who will go up in the sky to get it for us
and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?'
Nor is it across the sea, that you should say,
'Who will cross the sea to get it for us
and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?'
No, it is something very near to you,
already in your mouths and in your hearts;
you have only to carry it out."

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37

R. (cf. 33) **Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.**

I pray to you, O LORD,
for the time of your favor, O God!
In your great kindness answer me
with your constant help.

Answer me, O LORD, for bounteous is your kindness:
in your great mercy turn toward me.

R. **Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.**

I am afflicted and in pain;
let your saving help, O God, protect me.
I will praise the name of God in song,
and I will glorify him with thanksgiving.
R. **Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.**

"See, you lowly ones, and be glad;
you who seek God, may your hearts revive!
For the LORD hears the poor,
and his own who are in bonds he spurns not."

R. **Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.**
For God will save Zion
and rebuild the cities of Judah.

The descendants of his servants shall inherit it,
and those who love his name shall inhabit it.
R. Turn to the Lord in your need, and you will live.

Alternative Psalm

Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11

R.(9a) Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul;
the decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.

R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the command of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eye.

R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

They are more precious than gold,
than a heap of purest gold;
sweeter also than syrup
or honey from the comb.

R. Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

Reading 2

Colossians 1:15-20

Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.
For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth,
the visible and the invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers;
all things were created through him and for him.
He is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.
He is the head of the body, the church.
He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
that in all things he himself might be preeminent.
For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile all things for him,
making peace by the blood of his cross
through him, whether those on earth or those in heaven.

Alleluia

Cf. John 6:63c, 68c

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life;
you have the words of everlasting life.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

Luke 10:25-37

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test Jesus and said,
"Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law?

How do you read it?"

He said in reply,

"You shall love the Lord, your God,

with all your heart,

with all your being,

with all your strength,

and with all your mind,

and your neighbor as yourself."

He replied to him, "You have answered correctly;
do this and you will live."

But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus,
"And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied,

"A man fell victim to robbers

as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.

They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead.

A priest happened to be going down that road,

but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side.

Likewise a Levite came to the place,

and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side.

But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him

was moved with compassion at the sight.

He approached the victim,

poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them.

Then he lifted him up on his own animal,

took him to an inn, and cared for him.

The next day he took out two silver coins

and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction,

'Take care of him.

If you spend more than what I have given you,

I shall repay you on my way back.'

Which of these three, in your opinion,

was neighbor to the robbers' victim?"

He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Exegesis

Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Deuteronomy is the fifth and final book of the Pentateuch. Scholars concur that the book in its final form was assembled from parchments over a period of many years. The content of the book contain accounts of events in the life of the Israelites a few years prior to their arrival in the Promised Land. Our pericope would seem to have been written at a time close to the death of Moses. Chapter 34 chronicles the death and burial of Moses. Moses will lead the people through the desert and view the Promised Land but not enter it.

Chapter 30 begins with a plea for God's mercy and a call for the people to repent. "When all these things which I set before you, the blessings and the curses, are fulfilled in you, and from whatever nations the Lord, your God, may have dispersed you, you ponder them in your heart: then provided that you and your children return to the Lord, your God, and heed His voice with all your heart and all your soul, just as I now command you, the Lord, your God, will change your lot; taking pity on you, He will again gather you from all the nations wherein He has scattered you." (Deut 30: 1-3). The Hebrew word for God in this chapter is *Elohim*. *Elohim* is often the word for God when describing the personal nature of God. The expression, *your God*, is repeated throughout this chapter.

The section that follows our selected passage concludes chapter 30 and is titled *The Choice before Israel*. "Hear, then, I have today set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I enjoin on you today, loving Him, and walking in His ways, and keeping His commandments, statutes and decrees, you will live and grow numerous, and the Lord, your God will bless you in the land you are entering to occupy. (Deut 30: 15-16). The land they are about to enter is the Promised Land, symbolic to us as eternal life. "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord God, your God..." (Deut 30: 19b-20a). Life is a choice.

Our pericope is titled in some translations *God's Command is Clear*.

Return to the LORD, your God, with all your heart and all your soul. Note again the very personal nature of this response to a very personal God, e.g., your God. The Hebrew word translated as *heart* is *lebob*, which describes the innermost person, the mind, will, and conscience. The Hebrew word for *soul* is *nepes* which describes the depth of being or the breath of life and being. The word *nepes* first appears in Sacred Scripture in *Genesis* in the *Creation Story*: "and man became a living being (*nepes*). (Gen 2:7).

No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out. Following the Decalogue Moses proclaimed to the people the *Great Commandment, the Shema*: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart (*lebob*), with all your soul (*nepes*), and with all your strength. Take to heart (*lebob*) these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad..." (Deut 6: 4-7). Note that the original proclamation of the Great Commandment required that it be always in their hearts and on their lips.

St. Paul will later quote Deut 30:14 when describing Christ as the fulfillment of the Law: *But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say to your heart, 'Who will go up into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will go down into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.) But what does it say? "The word is near to you, in your mouth and in your heart." (that is, the word of faith that we preach), for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and is so justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. (Rom 10: 6-10).*

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 69:14, 17, 30-31, 33-34, 36, 37

Psalm 69 consists of thirty-seven verses and is titled *A Cry of Anguish in Great distress*. The context of the psalm suggests that it was promulgated during the exile or in the early post exilic period.

The psalm begins, “Save me, O God, for the waters have reached my neck.” The psalmist is calling on God (*Elohim*) to save him. Verse 3 suggests that it was of his own doing that he is now in need of salvation, i.e., “I have sunk into the mire... I have gone down...” It is of his own actions that he is in this anguish and distress.

The psalmist continues to call out to the God: *Answer me, O LORD, for bounteous is your kindness: in your great mercy turn toward me*. The Hebrew word for *kindness* here is *hesed*. *Hesed* is often translated as *steadfast love*, but also connotes, kindness, faithfulness, loyalty, covenantal relationship, goodness and mercy. All these attributes are also attributed to the Greek word *agape* that permeates the NT. The Hebrew word translated as *mercy* is *rahamim*. *Rahamim* also suggests a feeling of love and faithfulness but also connotes a sense of deep compassion and mercy.

In the final verses (30-37) the psalmist turns to praise and thanksgiving to God who hears the cry of the distressed and rescues them. *I will praise the name of God in song, and I will glorify him with thanksgiving*. The Hebrew word for *thanksgiving* is *todah*, which describes an outward vocal expression of gratitude as in a song of praise,

Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11

Psalm 19 is titled *God's Glory in the Heavens and in the Law*. It consists of 15 verses. The first seven verses proclaim the glory of God in His creation, often referred to as a *Creation Psalm*. Verses 8 through 15 proclaim the glory of God in His Law. The Law of God is perfect, refreshing, trustworthy, giving wisdom, enlightening, clear, pure, enduring, true, just, desirable, and as sweet as honey. Omitted verses 13 and 14 are penitential, asking God for forgiveness for failure to obey His Law.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. It is important to note that the word *fear*, *yirah* in Hebrew can connote craven fear as we know it. However, most often in reference to fear of God in scripture it refers to a sense of awe or reverence in relationship to God. It evokes a sense of the creature standing before his creator, as in bowing or kneeling.

Verse 11, speaking of the Word of the Law, describes it as *More desirable than gold. Than a hoard of purest gold, sweeter than honey or dripping from the comb*. This evokes the words of the Prophet Jeremaih who devoured the Scroll of the Law and found it as sweet as honey. (Jer 15:16).

The message is that the Word of God must be received and internalized for it to fulfill its purpose. In the words of Jesus, “Fulfilled in your hearing.”

Exegesis (Continued)

Colossians 1:15-20

Modern scholarship debates whether *Colossians* was written by Paul or one of his disciples. That discussion is beyond the scope of this exegesis, and for the sake of this writing I will use Paul as the author.

Colossae is a town in the Lycus Valley in Asia Minor. It is located a few miles east of Ephesus. It was known for its wool and textile industry. In fact, its name comes from a dark red dye used for wool, *colossinus*. Colossae was a gentile territory made up of Persians and Greeks with a sizable Jewish population of approximately 10,000.

There is no record of Paul ever visiting Colossae. The community there was founded by Epaphras, a native of Colossae. Philemon and the slave Onesimus also were natives of Colossae.

As is often the situation with Paul's letters, the author addresses problems that have arisen in the community. One of the struggles of the early Church that Paul seeks to address is an obvious Persian astrological influence as well as a Hellenistic impact on the theology of the community. Paul addresses this concern by reciting what is believed to be an early Christian hymn. The hymn emphasizes Christ, and His role in creation (vs 15-17) and in redemption (vs. 18-20).

Christ as the preexisting Logos through whom all things came into being is emphasized by John in the prologue of his Gospel. "In the beginning (*arche*) was the Word (*Logos*). And the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning (*arche*) with God. All things came to be through Him, and without Him nothing came to be. What came to be through Him was life..." (Jn 1: 1-3). Wisdom literature also spoke of the preexisting Logos of God when describing the Wisdom of God. "Wisdom, the artificer of all, taught me." (Wis 7: 22). "God of my fathers, Lord of mercy, you who have made all things by Your Word and in Your wisdom have established man..." (Wis 9: 1-2).

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. The Greek word that is translated as *beginning* is *arche*. This word would have been particularly poignant for the Hellenists of the community at Colossae. One of the deepest questions posited by Greek Philosophy was the necessary existence of a preexisting force that would initiate all of creation into motion or being. They called that element the *arche*, the first principle, the unmoved mover. Paul is stating clearly here as is the Beloved Disciple John in his Gospel, that Jesus is the *Arche*, He is the First Principle.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 10:25-37

There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test Jesus and said, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" The intent of the question was not friendly. The Greek word for *test* is *ekpeirazo*. It is the same word that is used by the devil when he tested Him in the desert. (See Lk 4:12). Inheritance is something that is a gift. Typically, an inheritance is not something that one must "do something" to receive. Most often it is a gift based on a family relationship. Inheritance in the OT is often associated with the gift of the Promised Land, symbolic of Heaven. (See Gen 28:4; Deut 1:8, 2:12, 4:1). Psalm 15:5 refers to the Lord and one's inheritance. Psalm 37:18 speaks of an eternal inheritance: "The Lord watches over the days of the blameless; their inheritance lasts forever." The Greek word translated as *eternal life* here is *aionios zoe*. *Aionios* describes something that is everlasting, perpetual, without end. *Zoe* is the Greek word for *life* that speaks of life that has its source as the life-breath of God. It is distinguished from the Greek word *bios* which typically refers to biological or corporeal life.

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." The scholar quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. The Greek word translated here as *being* is *psyche* which is typically translated as *soul*. It is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word *nepes*. Deuteronomy 6:5 is as follows: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart (*lebob*), with all your soul (*nepes*), and with all your strength." Leviticus 19:18 reads: "Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Note that *neighbor* seems to imply here, fellow countrymen. Jesus expands the definition of neighbor beyond nationality, even to extend to one's enemy in need along the path of life. It is noteworthy to point out that the scholar adds to the Great Shema the phrase, *and with all your mind*. The Greek word for *mind* is *dianoia*. *Dianoia* describes the seat of one's intentions.

Remember that the question was, "Who is my neighbor?" In His question to the scholar Jesus reverses that question when he asks, "Who was neighbor to the robber's victim?" Jesus moves the focus from the neighbor in need to the gift giver. The answer to the scholar's question as to what I "must do" is to see with the eyes of compassion and to be a good neighbor to those in need who are in your path.

St. Augustine was graced with the gift to go deeper into the parables of Jesus. The parables often have several layers of meaning. St. Augustine interpreted this parable at a deep Spiritual and allegorical level. He preached that the parable of *The Good Samaritan* is a story of Christ's restoration of humanity. Adam is the man attacked by Satan and his legions; he is stripped of his immortality and left dead to sin. The priest and the Levite represent the Old Covenant, the Law and the Prophets, and its inability to restore humanity to new life. Jesus comes to rescue humanity from sin and death, by pouring out His life on the Cross. He gives whatever it takes, a price that only He could pay. Jesus brings the beaten man to the Inn of the Church for refreshment and healing through the sacraments.¹

1. St. Augustine of Hippo; *De Quaest. Evang.* 2, 19.

Reflection

This weekend we will hear the parable that we call *The Good Samaritan*. It is certainly one of the most famous and quoted of all the parables of Jesus. Everyone knows what it means to be a Good Samaritan. It means to help someone in need that you encounter along the path of life. It means to look with compassion on the world and to be moved to action by that empathy. It means to have eyes to see a neighbor in need and be a good neighbor.

St. Augustine had a gift to see scripture at its deepest Spiritual level. He once delivered an interesting sermon on the parable of *The Good Samaritan*. First, he pointed out the fact that everyone was journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jericho was the *sin city* of the time. Everything in the Gospel of Luke is about the journey to Jerusalem. Like the disciples on Easter Sunday leaving Jerusalem and on the road to Emmaus, they were going the wrong way. Each one of us is represented by the person along the side of the road, half dead because of sin, alone and helpless, and in need of a savior.

A priest and a Levite, guided by religious ritual and norms, pass by on the opposite side of the road but going in the same direction. They too represent the sinfulness of humanity, people in need of direction and healing. Now traveling on the same road, in the same direction is a Samaritan. The Samaritan was an outsider, a half breed. In his sermon St. Augustine said that the Samaritan is Jesus Himself, human and divine. He is the one who was walking with the disciples on the way to Emmaus. He is the one who travels with us along the way, who enters fully into our humanity. He is the one who becomes sin to take our sins away. He is the one who looks with compassion upon us and seeks to heal us.

St. Augustine said that the first clue that he received that the Samaritan represents Jesus is the fact that he gives the innkeeper what we would call today a “blank check.” He tells the innkeeper to do whatever it takes, that no matter what the cost he will pay the price. Only God can make such an open-ended promise. Only God has no limit to love and mercy and healing. It is God’s love involved here. It is God who will pay the ultimate price for our sins. It is the cross of Jesus that heals the wounds of sin. He alone is our savior.

But remember the question is, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” After Jesus tells this parable he says, “Go and do likewise.” So, we are called to be the conduit of God’s empathy and love in our world. We are called to be the hands and the feet of our Savior. We are called to be the Good Samaritan, to be the good neighbor to those in need whom God places in our path. We are called to respond to God’s love, to love God through love of neighbor. But always remember the question! Our eternal life depends on the answer: “Go and do likewise.”

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ,



Personal Witness

I was blessed to be raised in an environment of love. Grandparents, parents and extended family were living examples of compassion. They all lived their Catholic Christian faith by caring for those in need. I have shared numerous examples of that in previous Scripture reflections and personal witness accounts. I strayed from these inherited traits for a time in my young adult life but have gradually drifted back to my roots.

In my early thirties I had a life-changing experience that led me deeper in my faith, my involvement in the Church and ultimately my ordination to the priesthood. One of the lived experiences that I have not shared that much was an increase in compassion and empathy. Before the conversion experience I did not often see the person in need in my path. Compassion was not even a question because I did not even see the neighbor along the road. In some ways life became more difficult for me after the experience because I began to see clearly those in need, such that I even began to personally feel the burdens that they were carrying. It quickly became a Cross too heavy to carry. The good news is that it moved me deeper into prayer and united me more closely to the Cross of Christ.

As I began parish ministry, I felt myself moving closer to the burdens of others. They became a shared weight as I walked with parishioners and families along the way. I found that sharing the burdens as a community was helpful in bringing the congregation together, walking with Jesus on the way together. As time passed, I found the weight of compassion growing heavier such that I felt that I could not go on. Twenty years had passed before I first fell under the weight and felt that I had hit a brick wall. I knew that it was time for an extended retreat to regain my strength. As I settled in at the retreat house, I walked over to the bookshelf that covered the entire wall, picked out a book at random and opened it to this page:

Learn to relate to others through My love rather than yours. Your human love is ever so limited, full of flaws and manipulation. My loving Presence, which always enfolds you, is available to bless others as well as you. Instead of trying harder to help people through your own paltry supplies, become aware of My unlimited supply, which is accessible to you continually. Let My love envelop your outreach to other people.

Many of My precious children have fallen prey to burnout. A better description of their condition might be “drain-out.” Countless interactions with people in need have drained them, without their conscious awareness. You are among these weary ones, who are like wounded soldiers in need of R&R. Take time to rest in the Love-Light of My Presence. I will gradually restore to you the energy that you have lost over the years. *Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and you will find rest for your souls.*²

From that moment on I began to learn how to let God love in and through me. As St. Paul described it: “It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me.” Life changed again, and for that I am eternally grateful!



2. Young, Sarah; Jesus Calling— Enjoying Peace in His Presence; Thomas Nelson Press; page 139.