

## Twenty-eighth Sunday Ordinary C

Many years ago, I was working with a couple that was preparing for marriage. This couple had decided on the date for their wedding. They were not that choosy about the readings that they wanted for their wedding. They decided that, whatever the Sunday readings were on the weekend that they got married would be fine for them. Thinking about this, I said to them, "Why don't we look to see what the readings are for the weekend that you have chosen." I looked up the readings for that weekend and they happened to be the readings that you heard today. (2 Kings 5:14-17; Lk 17:11-19) I said to the couple, "I don't think that you want reading about leprosy for your wedding." They quickly agreed, and decided to choose other readings.

While the readings today are not pleasant because they deal with leprosy; they are important readings nevertheless. Otherwise, the Church would not have included them in the Lectionary. The first reading, the responsorial psalm, and the Gospel reading are usually related in some way. There will be some common theme in all of them. There are many elements that are common in these besides leprosy. In the first reading, Naaman the Syrian, has leprosy. A Syrian is a foreigner. He is not a Jew. Naaman wants to be healed so he comes to Israel to a great prophet. The prophet, Elisha, doesn't interact with Naaman. He just gives him instructions through a servant. Naaman does as he is instructed. This is what we heard in the first reading. Naaman is healed of the leprosy and becomes clean. Naaman returns to the prophet glorifying God and gives thanks for being healed.

In our Gospel reading, ten lepers approach Jesus but stand off at a distance. They plead for mercy. From a distance Jesus instructs them to go show themselves to the priests. The lepers did as they were instructed, much like Naaman did. The ten lepers were cleansed of their leprosy. Only one, the foreigner, returned to Jesus glorifying God and gave thanks for being healed. Because Naaman did as he was instructed, he was healed. Naaman came to believe in the God of Israel. As we heard in the Gospel, the lepers did as they were instructed. Only one returned to give thanks. Jesus told the foreigner that it was his faith that saved him. The foreigner already had faith. This led to his healing.

We should take a look at the other nine lepers that were cleansed. They did as they were instructed. That is not a bad thing. Jesus gave them a command, and they followed it. Obedience to God's command is important. But we need to take a closer look at Jesus' reaction to learn more. When the leper that was a foreigner was the only one that returned, Jesus sounded upset. He said, "Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" Even though Jesus had instructed all ten to go show themselves to the priests, it sounds like He expected them to return to give Him thanks for healing them. It's as if Jesus is saying, "Only one out of the ten even thought of giving thanks for this tremendous blessing that they received."

Sin is like leprosy for the soul. Unrepented and unforgiven sin slowly eats away at the soul and damages it much like leprosy slowly eats away and damages the flesh. Only God can heal the soul of this damage. When we come to Mass, we approach God, we acknowledge our sins and we ask for forgiveness. That is why the penitential rite is at the beginning of Mass. However, we don't just leave after the penitential rite is over, do we? No, we stay because we know that Jesus is teaching us and

instructing us in His word, in the readings and in the homily. Once Jesus has taught and instructed us through His Word, we approach Jesus once again at the table for communion. The Eucharist forgives venial sins and cleanses our souls. We are like Naaman, and the lepers in our Gospel reading. Much like them we approach Jesus and ask Him, "Jesus, have mercy on us?" Jesus responds, "Show yourselves to the priest." Once we have received communion and received healing, what do we do then? How many actually give thanks to God for this tremendous blessing that they have received? Jesus has just given us this tremendous favor of cleansing our souls, and do we return glorifying God and giving thanks to Jesus? How many receive communion and then walk straight out the door and leave Mass before it's over? Much like our Gospel reading, Jesus is standing here wondering, "There were over 300 people that received communion. How come only 50, or perhaps 75, gave thanks? How come so many people walked out of the church immediately after receiving communion?"

If we only really know and appreciated the great blessing that God gives to us in His Son Jesus, and the great blessing that we receive in the Eucharist and the healing of our souls, all of us, from the bottom of our hearts, with sincere gratitude, would be glorifying God and thanking Jesus for this healing. Our sins have been forgiven. We have been cleansed. We are made whole again, and given the pledge of eternal life. Do we actually realize what happens to us during Mass? These readings about leprosy do have an important message to teach us. We are unclean, and have been clean. We are fragmented because of sin, but have been made whole again. We have been damaged by sin, but have been restored once again by the great love and mercy that God shows to us. May we have a greater appreciation for the Mass and what God does for us. And may we lift up our hearts and hands in thankful praise for the salvation that only God can provide.