

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

2 Kings 5:14-17

Naaman was the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army and also a national hero. He was stricken with the dreaded disease of leprosy. It was probably still in its early stages when his wife was told by her Israelite servant girl that a prophet of God in Israel could cure him. He went to the prophet's home and Elisha told him to go and bathe himself in the Jordan River seven times and he would be cured. Naaman was insulted at being told to do such a trivial thing in such a common, dirty river (which was no match hygienically for the mountain spring waters of Damascus), but he was advised by his counselor to follow the prophet's command.¹

¹⁴Naaman went down and plunged into the Jordan, Water, which is used for bodily cleanliness, also signifies moral purification.⁴ seven times at the word of Elisha, the man of God. "Seven" means completeness or abundance.⁵ Naaman learned that obedience to God begins with humility for God can use anything to accomplish his purposes.¹ His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean of his leprosy. He was cleansed of his arrogance as well!³ This story also prefigures the washing from the impurity of sin that happens in the sacrament of Baptism.⁵

¹⁵Naaman returned with his whole retinue to the man of God. On his arrival he stood before Elisha and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant."

¹⁶Elisha replied, "As the Lord lives whom I serve," Elisha makes it clear that God has cured Naaman and he was only the instrument. "I will not take it," and despite Naaman's urging, he still refused. Elisha is a true prophet and servant of God and his reward is that Naaman has come to the truth about God. Genuine grace and the healing that comes with it is free.³

¹⁷Naaman said: "If you will not accept, please let me, your servant, have two mule-loads of earth," Naaman acknowledges Yahweh as Lord of all the earth but realizes he is God of Israel in a special way. Therefore, he wishes to have some of the soil of Israel upon which to build his altar when he worships the true God in Damascus, his home city.² "for I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice to any other god except to the Lord." Naaman has become a symbol of the Gentile peoples who come to know the one true God.⁵ Once again we see that God's perfect plan excludes no one.³

2 Timothy 2:8-13

Beloved:

⁸Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, The fact of Christ's resurrection is the basis of our own hope no matter what trials we face.⁸ The Resurrection is the climax of our faith and the fixed reference point for Christian living. Christ lives on in a glorified condition: Christ is alive. He is not someone who has gone, someone who existed for a time and then passed on, leaving us a wonderful example and a great memory. No, Christ is alive. Jesus is Emmanuel: God with us.⁷ a descendant of David: The Messiah comes from the stock of David. This is authentically human stock. Jesus is truly of the human race. He shares our destiny of being born, growing, suffering, and dying after experiencing joys and trials. If we go to Jesus and talk about what we know concerning hope and disappointment, joy and struggle, luminous prayer or obscure faith, anxiety in the face of death's frontier, we speak to One Who knows our heart, not only through His Divine understanding but also through His human experience.⁴ such is my gospel, Jesus' glorious resurrection and his descent from David were key points in St. Paul's preaching.⁷ for which I am suffering, Here Paul makes the memorable comparison between the limitations placed on his person and the impossibility of placing limitations on the gospel he preaches.³

even to the point of chains, like a criminal. But the word of God, In this context, the “word of God” is equivalent to the gospel proclaimed by word of mouth.¹⁴ **is not chained.** The word of God cannot be imprisoned even if the one proclaiming it is put into chains. Paul managed to preach it even in prison and other preachers carried it to the ends of the earth. No matter how often they were imprisoned or killed, the word of God continued to spread. This suffering is seen as contributing to the salvation of the world.⁶

10Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen, It is SUFFERING, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls. SUFFERING, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the Redemption.⁸ **so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory.** Paul’s sufferings are of value to those chosen for Christianity, both those already Christian and those not yet converted.² “Eternal glory” refers to the everlasting life in heaven, where the saints enter the fullness of their inheritance.¹⁴

11This saying is trustworthy: If we have died with him we shall also live with him; When Paul speaks of dying with Christ and rising with him, he has in mind not only the mystical death and resurrection of Baptism, but also the development of this experience in the Christian life with special emphasis on the physical sufferings and dangers of the apostolate. The final stage of this assimilation with Christ is to take place at the end of the world.² Our ultimate certainty is that Christ will follow through on his promises and threats and so exercise his justice and mercy in perfect faithfulness to the terms of the New Covenant.¹⁴

12if we persevere we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him he will deny us. If we deny Christ he will not recognize us as his followers at the judgment.²

13If we are unfaithful he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. Christ will be faithful either to his promise to punish or to his promise to show love and mercy for he is unchangeable in his very nature.²

On September 14, 2004, Pope John Paul II spoke from Castle Gandolfo in Italy: “Society is experiencing the tragic consequences of the eclipse of the sense of God. The proclamation of the gospel is a duty that no single believer can ignore.”

Luke 17:11-19

Leprosy was a fatal bacterial disease that either had ulcerated skin eruptions or the loss of sensation and muscular movement and progressive paralysis with the loss of extremities (fingers, hands, toes, feet) or all of the above. There were also a number of other infectious skin diseases that were sometimes lumped under the diagnosis of “leprosy.”¹⁰ Unsightly skin diseases were considered to be caused by a devil.²

11As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem, he traveled through Samaria and Galilee. Samaritan territory lies in central Palestine between Judea (south) and Galilee (north). Historically, Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies who worshiped in rival sanctuaries, the former in Jerusalem and the latter on Mt. Gerizim. Although the Samaritans were distant descendants of the northern tribes of Israel, the Jews considered them impure because their ancestors had intermarried with foreign immigrants and honored foreign gods.⁹

12As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him. They stood at a distance from him, Because lepers were unclean, they were excluded from the Temple and ostracized from Israelite society. Only when they recovered, and passed Levitical inspection, could they be reinstated into Israel’s covenant life.⁹

13and raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!” The cure of leprosy is one of the messianic signs which Jesus points out to the disciples of John the Baptist in 7:22 and the power to cure leprosy is included in the mission of the apostles in Mt. 10:8.¹⁰

14And when he saw them, he said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” According to Jewish Law, leprosy had to be established as a fact by a priest, and the unfortunate leper was declared “unclean” and was removed from society. If he desired to speak to someone, he had to remain at a certain distance. Diverse skin diseases were designated as leprosy, and it sometimes happened that a leper was cured. In that case, his cure had likewise to be certified by a priest, and he was then permitted to enjoy normal social relations.⁴ As they were going they were cleansed. Jesus sent them to the priest before they were healed. Their obedience in faith resulted in their being healed.¹

15And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice;

16and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. Our conventional understanding of “thanks” is not what the Scriptures mean, for these acclamations, praises, and glorifications are actually confessions of faith in the Lord and an acknowledgement of his love for his people. The fact of the leper returning to give thanks is as much a confession of faith and an acknowledgement of the Lord’s sovereignty in the man’s life as it is an encouragement to other persons to imitate him by saying “thank you.”¹¹ He was a Samaritan. It is odd that a Samaritan would have been in a group of Jewish lepers; yet common misery and rejection by society apparently broke down the walls between them.⁶ This was the ultimate outsider being both a leper and a Samaritan!

17Jesus said in reply, “Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine?” Ingratitude is one of the most hideous forms of selfishness in the human heart. In the scriptures Jesus is presented as INCARNATE GRATITUDE. The Gospel shows us Jesus in constant thanksgiving toward His Father.⁴

“18Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?” The grace of God is for everyone but not everyone is grateful.¹ For Luke, the only Gentile among the Gospel writers, it was important to show that Jesus extended his ministry beyond the Jews.¹³

19Then he said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has saved you.” This is the same message that Jesus gave to the woman who washed his feet, the woman cured of the hemorrhage and the man healed of blindness. This healing brought wholeness and a proper relationship to God.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study Cycle C” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (2) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (3) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers Year C: 2004” by Aelred R. Rosser, (4) “Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings Year C” by ACHILLE DEGEEST, O.F.M., (5) “The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst,” (6) “workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, (7) “The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians and Pastoral Epistles,” (8) “Salvifici doloris” by John Paul II, (9) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (10) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (11) “A Celebrants Guide to the New Sacramentary: Cycle C” by Kevin W. Irwin, (12) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Luke” by Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., (13) “Understanding The Scriptures” by Scott Hahn and (14) “The Letters Of Saint Paul To The Thessalonians, Timothy, And Titus” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.