

“As they were going they were cleansed. And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.” Words from our Gospel today from the 17th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

Some of the worst pains that we experience in life are not physical. Yes, there are moments when we break a bone and it feels like a bomb exploded in our brain; likewise, there are major illnesses that wreak such physical havoc on our bodies that we are sapped of all our energy and strength, and these are terrible sufferings. But there are sufferings that can be far more terrible and far worse: take for example, the emptiness of losing a beloved spouse of 60 years, or the anguish and helplessness of watching your only child die before you. How many people have had to endure traumatic experiences such as being intimately violated or suffer from the effects of war, or having been forced to leave the place they call home? If you keep up with the monthly Virtus Trainings we do as a Church, one of our recent articles was about ACE's, Adverse Childhood Experiences, and how such toxic experiences without caring support have really hindered a person's psychological development. We know that mental health disorders affect 1 out of every 7 people in the world. Losing one's job can foster a sense of failure, shame, or worthlessness not to mention while only compounding the daily headache of figuring out how to make ends meet. Sometimes, the anxieties we face not only cause us agony but completely overwhelm us into inaction. But even if someone is in fact looking for assistance, often they don't find the help they need because it is difficult for us to reach out and touch their suffering. Understandably, it is part of human nature to avoid suffering and to disassociate ourselves from it and so those who are suffering become stigmatized. Many resources go to alleviating physical pain, but many other pains such as these go untreated. So many people have to face their problems alone, which just might be the worst suffering of all.

In the days of old, there was no cure for leprosy. Those who contracted the disease had to stay away from others for the welfare of the community and they were stigmatized and rejected, perhaps a worse fate than the physical suffering caused by the illness. I suppose we've had but a taste of such an experience because of Covid a few years ago. Although we have since come by a physical cure for leprosy as a disease, the many spiritual, emotional, and psychological ailments we are yet facing are just some symptoms of what leprosy looks like among us today. Like St. Paul in our second reading, we too are enduring many sufferings as all of us know something of the pains of such leprosy for ourselves. St. Paul encourages us to persevere faithfully in the face of such trials, trusting in the great hope that is held in store for us by God who does in fact walk with us in these things and loves us through these things.

Indeed, our first reading and our Gospel reveals the transformative compassion of God towards those who are inflicted with leprosy. Naaman came from Syria, and having travelled throughout the world looking for healing, discovered that no one except God could help him. In following the Prophet Elisha's instruction, Naaman is cured, converted, amazed, and extraordinarily gracious towards the

God of Israel, our God. And in the Gospel, the lepers who came to Jesus had to speak with him from far off because of their condition, yet Jesus heard their plea and had mercy on them, and they too were cured as they went on their way. Notice that the cures of our Scripture stories today are not actually produced by the prophet Elisha or by Jesus. Quite often, we want and we expect God to cure us in our own way and on our own terms. Miracles do happen, but more often than not, they happen through the healing work of others. Praise God for the gift of healing that is given to doctors, to pharmacists, to researchers, to hospital workers, to counselors, to therapists, to priests, to parents, to the providers of chicken noodle soup as well as the authors of chicken noodle soup for the soul. In the spirit of the Gospel today, I think it is important that we take the opportunity to show our appreciation and say now, 'thank you' to all how have responded to their vocation and call, using the gifts God has given them for the healing of others. Thank you for your discipleship, and loving service.

Despite the great good that God continues to do for us throughout history and the good that God does through the lives and vocations and gifts of others who have a share in the compassionate love of God, the Gospel ends on a sorrowful note, with Jesus ruefully asking, "Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" Why is it that only one cleansed leper returned to thank Jesus? The following are nine suggested reasons as to why the other nine did not return: 1) One waited to find out if the cure was scientifically real; 2) One waited to see if the cure would last throughout his life before giving thanks; 3) One said he would see Jesus later anyway; 4) One decided that he had never had any problems to begin with; 5) One said he would have gotten better on his own; 6) One gave the glory to the priests instead of Jesus; 7) One said "Jesus only told us what to do - he didn't actually do anything"; 8) One said "Any rabbi could have done it" 9) One said "Now that I'm better, I have other things to do." We are also good at making excuses such as these and coming up with seemingly better reasons as to not return to God ways but carry on in our own decided way. This is something of the denial that St. Paul was speaking about regarding our faithfulness.

Though all the lepers were cured, only the leper who realized what had happened to him and who returned to give thanks heard Jesus say, "Your faith has saved you." The ultimate cure therefore is salvation, which is unlocked through gratitude. If we truly realized the immensity of the various kinds of leprosy we have been saved from in our lives, how could we not return to give thanks to God and so give our compassionate Savior our love and undying loyalty? While our Thanksgiving holiday is still over a month away, giving thanks is never out of season. Indeed, the Eucharist itself literally means thanksgiving. Sometimes we approach our relationship with God in the spiritual life and our celebration of the Eucharist wondering what we will get out of it or what we need to do in order for it to be a meaningful celebration. What if we changed our approach to one of simply asking, "What will I be most thankful for at this liturgy?" and lifting up our hearts to the Lord, symbolically put those things up on the altar to be offered to God. An attitude of gratitude instead of presumption or entitlement can make a big difference in how we come to appreciate the salvation offered us in the Eucharist. May we embrace the healing transformation that Christ brings, and realizing all that God has done for us, persevere always in giving thanks.

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 144

Reading I

2 Kgs 5:14-17

Naaman went down and plunged into the Jordan seven times
at the word of Elisha, the man of God.

His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child,
and he was clean of his leprosy.

Naaman 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."

Elisha replied, "As the LORD lives whom I serve, I will not take it;"
and despite Naaman's urging, he still refused.

Naaman said: "If you will not accept,
please let me, your servant, have two mule-loads of earth,
for I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice
to any other god except to the LORD."

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

R. (cf. 2b) **The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.**

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wondrous deeds;
his right hand has won victory for him,
his holy arm.

R. **The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.**

The LORD has made his salvation known:
in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.
He has remembered his kindness and his faithfulness
toward the house of Israel.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation by our God.

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands:
break into song; sing praise.

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

Reading II

2 Tm 2:8-13

Beloved:

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David:
such is my gospel, for which I am suffering,
even to the point of chains, like a criminal.

But the word of God is not chained.

Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen,
so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus,
together with eternal glory.

This saying is trustworthy:

If we have died with him
we shall also live with him;
if we persevere
we shall also reign with him.

But if we deny him
he will deny us.

If we are unfaithful
he remains faithful,
for he cannot deny himself.

Alleluia

1 Thes 5:18

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

In all circumstances, give thanks,
for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Lk 17:11-19

As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem,
he traveled through Samaria and Galilee.
As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him.
They stood at a distance from him and raised their voices, saying,
"Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!"
And when he saw them, he said,
"Go show yourselves to the priests."
As they were going they were cleansed.
And one of them, realizing he had been healed,
returned, glorifying God in a loud voice;
and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.
He was a Samaritan.
Jesus said in reply,
"Ten were cleansed, were they not?
Where are the other nine?
Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?"
Then he said to him, "Stand up and go;
your faith has saved you."