

October 9, 2022 – A Tale of Two Healings (28th Sunday in Ordinary Time)
Gospel of Luke 17:11:19
Fr. John

Two of our readings today concern the cleansing of individuals suffering from leprosy or serious skin infections and their responses or lack thereof afterward.

Our first reading concerns Namaan, a pagan Syrian Army general, who, at the prophet Elisha's direction, immersed himself in the Jordan River seven times and was healed of his disease.

Namaan was so grateful he wanted to reward Elisha, but the prophet refused any recompense. So Namaan, simply requested some soil from Israel on which he could build an altar to the God of Israel in his own country. For Namaan it was literally an 'earth-moving' experience.

This theme of the healing of an outsider is carried forth in today's gospel narrative. In this case - one of those healed was not only a leper but also a Samaritan - which would have been a double insult to any self-righteous Jew. [It's interesting to note that all ten lepers were calling out, 'Have mercy!!' which in the Greek Language is 'eleieson' - the same word used in our penitential rite in the Eucharist.

In both incidents the highlighted recipient of the healing miracle was a foreigner which we may immediately think of as someone from another country. However, the same term might also be applied to others of our own cultural background or even ourselves.

What part of us might be regarded as foreign because of our social background, ideology, or sexual orientation? Many people, especially children, for example, experience bullying because they are perceived not to be part of the mainstream or the 'in' group. Perhaps most of us have experienced something of this type of exclusion to one degree or another.

How do we recognize the stranger among us and what is the response to be taken?

Firstly, it is that of **gratitude** - the ability to take nothing for granted - appreciation for what is often overlooked. Seeing everything as gift rather than feeling entitled to what we thought we've earned.

Grateful people are usually optimistic people. They can anticipate the good which others are capable of accomplishing. Visualizing the potential greatness in others is a quality great educators and mentors have in bringing out the best in their students. [We might ask ourselves - do we bring out the best or the worst in others?]

This quality is perhaps what Jesus meant by faith - faith in others as gifted by God. He tells the Samaritan: 'Stand up and go on your way, your faith has been your salvation.' Now act upon it.

The second response in addition to gratitude is **good memory** - the ability to draw upon the best of one's life and one's tradition. Memory says: 'Look at what wonderful things you have done - this proves that you are capable of doing even more wonderful things - so don't give up!'

Memory is a key factor in recalling God's great redemptive act. Even in the prayer of the Mass we are reminded of Jesus' words at the Last Supper, 'Do this in memory of me.'

Namaan didn't want to forget either and he wanted to have some of the soil of Israel to take back with him. [Maybe that's why souvenirs are important - not for themselves but for the experiences which they are instrumental in recalling].

Ultimately however, a healing also places a challenge upon us. A challenge to enter into life more deeply. This is something we may not want to do. We don't necessarily crave the responsibility and the onus which a physical and spiritual healing draws us into. As Paul writes to Timothy: 'In preaching the gospel, I suffer as a criminal - even to the point of being thrown into chains!' But then he immediately adds 'But there is no chaining the word of God!'

The good news, as Paul says, is the magnificent possibility that we who preach and attempt to live the gospel will continually rediscover it when **by gratitude, by faith, and by remembrance** we bring to light God's wonderful gifts hidden in others and within ourselves.

On this Thanksgiving weekend we give all thanks and praise to God. AMEN.