

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD**  
**in**  
**THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**  
**Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**October 9, 2022**

**Lectionary Readings:**

**2 Kings 5:14-17**  
**2 Timothy 2:8-13**  
**Luke 17:11-19**

**Naaman needs to remember the God of Israel.**  
**Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.**  
**Remember to express gratitude.**

**Luke:**

In the ancient Middle East, skin diseases were many and widespread. Not all that are called *leprosy* actually were Hansen's disease. Skin rashes caused by poor nutrition and poor hygiene often received the same name. Acne, boils, molds and mildew, yeast infections, and baldness were misnamed. True leprosy was perhaps not as common as one would think. Naaman surely would have been quarantined if he really had leprosy. In practice, though, the result was fear and discrimination. Alienated from social interaction, lepers lived on the margins of society, outside the towns and villages, not admitted to the synagogues. They became even more alienated. Nine of the 10 lepers had this much to contend with; the tenth had even more of a disability: he was a Samaritan.

Our Gospel text says that all 10 were *healed*, but only one came back to give thanks to God. This is not just a question of bad manners or lack of gratitude. For nine of the lepers, the healing of their *physical* condition did very little for their *spiritual* state. For those nine, nothing much changed, except that their skin became healthy. The change was literally only skin deep. The Samaritan who returned to give thanks saw the whole world in a brand-new light. Not only was his skin clean, but his soul was enlightened by a powerful new awareness that an unheard-of power was now at work in the world. A rabbi from Galilee was apparently the instrument of divine intervention. The healed Samaritan felt drawn back to the person of Jesus. He had to see this man: to really see him now with the eyes of the heart.

The one whose heart was changed, not just his skin, was a Samaritan, a religious outcast, a minority person who had always been rejected by those who claimed to be speaking for God. He had had to live on the margins of society, not only because he was a leper. He had always been excluded from the fellowship of the Jews because he was of mixed ancestry, Jewish and Gentile, and because he belonged to a religion that was considered defective in its doctrinal purity. He was a half-breed racially and religiously. He has suffered more than the other nine.

Perhaps it was because of his special pain that he was more ready for the transforming experience of faith. Is it not the case that those who have suffered more are more open to the work of God in their lives? He experienced the same cleansing that the nine experienced. But in him, the result was that he came to see Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The others were healed but did not come to faith. Miracles do not, of themselves, result in faith. We need to be aware of that so we do not become too fascinated with miracles for their own sake.

## **Kings:**

Naaman was a Gentile, a general in the armies of Syrian King Benhadad II. He lived in the mid-800's BCE. Elisha was a prophet of the God of Israel, the successor of the great prophet Elijah. The sacred writer of all these stories from ancient Israel lived just after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. He favors stories that show that God's care goes beyond the confines of Israel's interests. He, like Luke, stresses God's mercy toward the marginalized, the outcasts of society. After his cure by a mere word from the prophet Elisha, Naaman decides to bring some soil from Israel back to Syria so that he can set up an "Israelite altar" upon it in Syria, in order to express his continuing gratitude. He, like so many others in his day, believed that the God of Israel could only be worshipped *on the soil of Israel*.

## **Timothy:**

The author of 2 Timothy, writing to the Christian community at a time when it was especially being tested by hard times -- persecutions and defections from the faith -- recalls the very foundation of the faith for Christians: Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord. The grammatical tense used for *risen* in the Greek language indicates that this action from the past continues to have an effect today. The resurrection of Christ endures to this very day. Words from a well-known baptismal hymn teach that as we have died with Christ in baptism, so we have been raised with him in that same experience. Therefore, we will share in his glory forever, since we have been so intimately united with him.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Can you share an experience when you became more open to God as a result of pain and suffering? Why was it that you may not have been as open to God's will before the experience of pain? Do you know of other persons who began to see life differently as a result of some great loss? What do you suppose brings us to that point when we are able to turn to God and cry out for help?

2. Is it true that God is always present and available for support in the best of times and in the worst of times? Is it true that we have a choice of acknowledging the presence and the power of God at all times or of not acknowledging God? Why is it that we choose not to see God's presence until we have to? Is it pride in the human heart? Denial of need and dependency? Arrogance and stubbornness?

3. Many of us were taught that God does not *cause* evil, pain, suffering or loss in our lives, but that God *allows* it to happen for some greater good. Do you agree with this? Are there any problems with this solution? Why do they say God *allows* but does not *cause* evil, whereas it's OK to say that God does not merely *allow* but is actually the *source and cause* of all good? Who is responsible for evil, then? Who is responsible for the suffering of innocent persons? Are you inclined to say, "The devil is responsible?"

## **SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION**

Ask a member of your family or of your sharing group to remind you of at least one time during the week that God is present with merciful love in the very instance when you are speaking, so that you might have an occasion to respond in faith and gratitude.

**PRAYER**  
**MY LORD AND MY GOD!**

**CATHOLIC DOCTRINE**

It is interesting that nowhere in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is there any mention of the celebration of the Eucharist as an act of thanksgiving offered to the heavenly Father in the person of Christ Jesus the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit. The very word Eucharist comes from a Greek word that means thanksgiving. In giving thanks, we return to the Lord what the Lord has given us, namely Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior. Yet, throughout the text of the Mass, in the Eucharistic Prayer especially, there is no end to the use of the word “thanksgiving.”

The liturgy of the Eucharist is trying to tell us something when we find: “It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you *thanks*.” (By the way, is it not ironic that the Preface for the Mass for Thanksgiving Day in the U.S.A. does not use the expression “*thanksgiving!*”) “...We offer you in *thanksgiving* this holy and living sacrifice” in the Eucharistic Prayer III. The Eucharist is the *Thanking Prayer* of the Christian Community.

The Church has much to be thankful for. Everything we have is gift from God. At confirmation, the bishop says: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.” The greatest privilege any human being could ever have been given is to receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus breathes upon his Church and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” We are privileged to have our sins forgiven and to be taken into the fellowship of the Trinity by adoption as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. We, too, were Samaritans, a race that had deviated from the path of salvation. In Christ Jesus, we have been brought near to God, to be presented before him as part of the Body of Christ on the Day of Judgment. The gift of God’s love does not merely decorate our lives with skin-deep holiness. We have been transformed into God’s likeness by the love that was poured out into our hearts. We have been completely changed. We have been saved. So, we return to give thanks. Every Sunday, we do so. Every chance we get.