

## The Twenty-Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C

"Jesus, Master, have mercy on us"

Question of the Week: *How do I cultivate an attitude of gratitude?*

- **II Kings 5:14-17**
  - Naaman returned to the man of God with all his company
- **Psalm 98:1 / 2-3 / 3-4**
  - *R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power*
- **II Timothy 2:8-13**
  - If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.
- **Luke 17:11-19**
  - "Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well."

### **Reading 1: Change of Skin, Change of Heart**

These three short verses complete the story of the leper Naaman. Before we investigate the story, however, a comment should be made about the ailment. The term "leprosy" is a misnomer, for no archeological evidence can be found that Hansen's disease (what Westerners refer to as "leprosy") existed in Palestine from ancient times. Hence, most scholars believe that "leprosy" loosely referred to series of skin rash ailments. A review of Leviticus 13 indicated that many lepers would recover and rejoin the community, unlike the incurable but treatable Hansen's disease. Very recently, evidence has been found that contemporaries of Jesus had the disease, but the evidence is very limited in scope.

The story actually opened in 2 Kings 5:1 with the discovery of Naaman's ailment and his scepticism. Two lower status characters (Naaman's small Israeli slave girl and his chariot driver) push the proud general into humbling actions. But the shame of visiting a vassal state for a cure and bathing in the muddy waters of a

small river reward the soldier with a change. His rough skin turned smooth. [5:14].

The more important change came from within. The arrogance of the soldier turned to gratitude. And his allegiance turned from the gods of his home country to those of a foreign land. Naaman saw the hand of God working, and he believed. [15-17]

Like the Samaritan in the cure of the ten lepers, Naaman had a change of heart in the face of his cure. His conversion challenges us in two ways. Do we see God's miracles in our lives? Do they change us and give us faith? Like these two men, we need to look with hope and be open to the power of God!

*When have you seen the power of God working in ways that surprised you? What happened?*

### **Responsorial: Contagious Praise**

*How have you encouraged others to pray?*



One of the easiest ways to evangelize others is to tell them you will pray for them (of course, be sincere and follow through). If you're bold, ask the person you're trying to evangelize to pray for you. If they agree, you've been successful, for prayer is an exercise of faith.

Prayer can be contagious. I pray for you and you pray for me. It creates a bond between people and commits people to God. But petition prayer is only the first step. The next step in the faith commitment is praise, acknowledging God as the Lord. When we encourage others to praise God in Christ, then we are truly evangelizing them. Praise leads to exhortation which leads to praise.

Psalm 98 was a perfect example of mixing praise with exhortation. As the singer praised God in a liturgical setting, he urged others to praise the Lord. The chant leader became "God's cheerleader," the person who inspired community spirit to worship God.

The psalm can be divided into three sections with a very loose "A-B-A" structure. 98:1b-4 set the tone with an imperative to "Sing a new song" for God's power and deeds. Victory, remembrance of the covenant, and universal reputation were the results of God's activity among his people. 98:7-9 commanded nature itself to give praise for God's control over the cosmos and his justice. The common thread between the beginning and end was the order to praise God (98:1b, 7-8); the difference was the audience (the nations in 98:2, 3b vs. nature in 98:7-9).

The "A-B-A" structure emphasized the center ("B" element). The core of the psalm was the exhortation to praise. Notice if the phrase "all the earth" was deleted, 98:4-6 would stand as liturgical direction to the Temple musicians to praise God in song (direction to harp, trumpet, and horn). By including the phrase "all the earth,"

the author included the universe in the call to Temple worship. In this way, communal praise had a cosmic dimension.

Prayer can be contagious. Praise can be contagious. Join us in praise to God. Encourage others to that praise. Call everyone and everything to shout joyous song to our Maker. Praise God in Christ!

*Invite one person to pray with you this week. In your prayer, praise God for his goodness and love.*

### **Reading 2: Remembering Jesus**

*Q: How do you keep Jesus in mind throughout your day? Who helps you in this effort?*

Why do people evangelize? Why are people will to endure great suffering to share what they believe in? These few verses in 2 Timothy give us a key. People will even die to remain in the presence of Jesus Christ.

"Remember Jesus Christ." These words were not only addressed to a young minister who never met the "historical" Jesus. They were meant for every Christian. As the note above stated, this imperative urged followers to worship in the presence of the Lord and to live life as if he were present. More to the point, the believer was to be Christ for others. Such witness built up the Church, even if that witness led to suffering, imprisonment, and death.

Obviously, the Christian could not do this alone. In fact, the act of "remembering" Christ was meant to be a communal activity. The hymn found in 2:11-13 stressed that fact. The act began at baptism (dying with him to live with him). If the community remained faithful (i.e., remained in the presence of the Lord), its members would enjoy the Lord's blessings: eternal life and glory.



If the community did not, the Lord would test the members by withdrawing his blessings. But he would always work toward their return to his presence.

So, why do people evangelize? They want to share the presence of Christ with others. It's that simple.

*How have you been evangelized? How have you evangelized others? What happened?*

## **Gospel: The Faith of the Outcast**

*Q: What fears cause people to cast others out?  
Why do they have such fears?*

Tragedy creates community. But it can also create a common enemy. So can fear and prejudice. We can ban together for the good. But we can unite against others. To isolate them. To cast them out.

We might think we see the real truth. But, ironically, there are times the outcast sees clearer than our passions allow us. Emotion blurs the picture that the distance of the outcast clarifies. Sometimes the outcast has a vision that our prejudice hides.

In Luke, ten lepers did not shrink back from their hope: to be part of the community again. But one of their number had a double burden. He was a leper and a hated ethnic enemy of the Jews, a Samaritan. His extreme isolation helped him see who Jesus really was. And it helped him become a disciple. Other words, the followers wanted the power to minister like Jesus did.

17:11 "along (the border)" is literally "in the midst of." The middle between Galilee and Samaria is either along the border of the two areas or directly through Galilee first, then Samaria. Luke did not know the geography of the area. But that was not his intent. He

touched on both areas as arenas for the preaching of the Good News. He would return to each area in the Acts of the Apostles.

17:12 "'shouted out" is literally "lifted up their voices."

17:13 "(great) Teacher" can also be translated "Master." This is the only time a non-disciple used this phrase (epistates). In the Leviticus, 13:45-46, the lepers should have warned strangers away because of their affliction. Here, they approach (even at a distance) and use the phrase as they ask for mercy. The combination of the title and the request implied an expectation for the coming kingdom. In his reign, God would grant mercy to the weak and the outcast.

17:19 "Go" is literally "Having gone." "Stand up" is "Having stood." In these sentences, the participle has the force of a command.

17:16 "He was a Samaritan." Like the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Luke used the hated Samaritan as the model for the disciple. This time, the Samaritan showed faith. Notice the man was an outcast for two reasons, ethnic impurity (i.e., heresy) and leprosy. For Luke, it seemed the more outcast the person, the clearer he or she could see the power and will of God.

17:19 "Stand up" can also be translated "Rise up," another way to express resurrection. At the point the man returned to Jesus, he became a disciple and a subject of God's Kingdom.

In a story of healing, Luke again affirmed the mission of Jesus to the outcast.



Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. [17:11a] Pointing out the destination of the journey, Luke emphasized the nature of Jesus' mission. His way was the road to humiliation and death in Jerusalem. Healing and preaching to the outcasts laid the groundwork for the capital charges that would be brought against him by the Jewish leaders.

The journey would take Jesus into the area of Galilee and Samaria; the communities of each hated each other and, so, were ripe for healing and the preaching of the Good News. So, Luke sets up the story of mixed outcasts who banded together out of necessity. As centuries-long enemies, Samaritans and Jews would never have eaten together unless the situation was desperate. Leprosy created such conditions for meal fellowship.

Standing at a distance, the ten lepers implored Jesus for a healing. [17:12-13] The distance was required by the Law, which both Samaritan and Jew followed (Leviticus 13:45-46). Their request was an act of faith in the healer, for they should have cried out "Unclean! Unclean!"

Jesus obliged their request with the command to show themselves to the priests, as required by the Law (Leviticus 14:1-32). [17:14a] Notice that only the word of Jesus was sufficient for the healing. Not only does speaking the word allow Jesus to remain ritually clean (he does not touch the lepers themselves), his word reveals his personal power. A person with such Godlike powers must be intimate with the Creator; he must speak the word of God and be filled with God's Spirit. When the healed lepers saw the priests (in Jerusalem), they would carry the physical evidence of who Jesus was. Their story to the priests would be a testimony to Jesus of Nazareth. The lepers would be advance men in Jerusalem for the wandering rabbi.

But, realizing he was healed, the Samaritan returned to praise God and thank the Lord. The hated foreigner fell at the feet of Jesus and became a disciple. [17:15-16] While the nine Jewish lepers witnessed to what Jesus did, the Samaritan witnessed to who Jesus was (and is). The rhetorical question Jesus asked was only a bridge to focus the crowd's attention on the outcast. From the position of submission, the Samaritan stood up at the command of Jesus (this is a sign of the resurrection, since the Greek word for resurrection, *anastasis*, means to "stand up"). [17:17-18a]

Finally, Jesus told the Samaritan, "Your faith has saved you." [17:18b] Many people have misinterpreted this statement; they believe people can heal themselves, if they only call upon their inner power. In this scenario, Jesus became the teacher who simply pointed out their inner power and gave them the means to "tap" into it.

These people forget who was in charge. Jesus did not explain an inner power or provide a hidden wisdom. He commanded healing. He lifted up the outcast (the Samaritan leper) to a new life. And, through Jesus' comment to the Samaritan, he affirmed the trust that the new disciple placed in him.

Faith is the conduit of God's activity, but God is not bound to act through faith. In fact, God usually acts outside the presuppositions we place upon faith. As a walk with Jesus, faith can take into areas over which we have no control. Into areas of the outcast. Into areas where Jesus raises us up. Like the Samaritan, we only need to trust in the Lord and allow him to affirm that trust.

**Catechism Theme: The Anointing of the Sick**

1505 Moved by so much suffering, Christ . . . makes . . . miseries (of the sick) his own: "He



took our infirmities and bore our diseases." His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross, Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the "sin of the world," of which illness is only a consequence.

In the story of the Ten Lepers, Jesus healed on his way to Jerusalem, the place of his Passover. The healing of the lepers and the faith of the Samaritan foreshadow the events of Christ's death and resurrection. Healing revealed God's kingdom and called people to faith; so, too, did the death and resurrection of Jesus call his followers to a deeper faith.

What "healings" in your life have called you to deeper faith? How have these healings revealed God's presence in your life? How have you responded?

Many of us can empathize with the returning Samaritan. We have all been misjudged and maligned at one point in life or another. We can easily see the fault of those who wrong us. But, when we are on the other side, when we judge others, does our judgment blind us to the needs of others? And to faith in God?

Luckily, the healed Samaritan gives us the key to heal us from our injuries and keep us from striking at others. Kneel at the feet of the Lord. Praise God for his goodness. And, await to be raised up.

*Q: How can you set your prejudices or hurts at the feet of the Lord this week? How can you await his healing?*