

HOMILY SUNDAY 28-C (Homily 02)

“Gratitude and Praise”

(2 Kings 5:14-17; Psalm 98; 2 Timothy 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19)

A general principle of the Liturgy of the Word is to make a relevant connection especially between the first reading and the Gospel. The psalm seeks to underline any possible common theme between the two. The second reading may or may not fit that theme, if there is one. If it does then that is a plus, driving home the message more deeply.

In the case of today’s readings, the liturgists have certainly succeeded in that goal with regard to the first reading and the Gospel. A comparison of the two reveals a clear common message of the importance of faith and gratitude. Even the small differences in the two stories hold helpful messages for us.

In the first reading, Naaman is a foreign leper, a non-Jew, who travels to Israel seeking healing. In the Gospel, the ten lepers, including one non-Jew, a Samaritan, approach Jesus seeking healing.

The prophet Elisha keeps Naaman at a distance, not coming out to see him, but only sending instructions for him to bathe in the Jordan. The ten lepers keep a required distance away from Jesus, as they are unclean.

Naaman made his request of Elisha through his servants. First, he had faith in the Israelite servant girl in his household who told him about the prophet Elisha, then in his servants accompanying him who convinced him to be humble and bathe in the Jordan. The ten lepers had already come to some faith in Jesus for they did not ask for alms as usual, but cried out in faith to Jesus as master to have mercy on them.

Naaman protests the simple order of the prophet, expecting something more befitting a dignitary, but with the advice of his servants, humbly sets aside his ego, obeys the word of the prophet and bathes in the Jordan seven times. In the Gospel, Jesus tests the lepers by not acting directly and instead simply telling them to go to show themselves to the priests. They also obey and set out on that journey.

Naaman is healed after his seventh dip in the Jordan; the lepers are healed on the way to see the priests.

Naaman returns full of gratitude, wanting to give the prophet a gift. In the gospel, only the non-Jewish leper, the Samaritan, returns to thank Jesus,

When the prophet declines to accept a gift from Naaman, Naaman requests two loads of earth from Israel so that he can offer worship, thanks and praise to the God of Israel. He has become a believer in monotheism and has moved away from his pagan gods. He has been healed not only physically, but has been transformed personally and spiritually. Naaman now has a new relationship with the creator of this world.

The nine Jewish lepers have been healed physically, but they did not experience any inner transformation. They seem to have been limited in their faith life and their awareness of what has happened to them. They were satisfied with only keeping the Law, with a dutiful rather than personal faith.

The Samaritan on the other hand, like Naaman, returns to give thanks, and not only to give thanks, but to praise God. He too has come to faith in God, only in his case he comes to believe in Jesus. He has a new relationship with God that includes praise and worship of Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

The point of these stories is not the healing as such, but the response of those who were touched by God's mercy. Naaman recognizes that the God of Israel has acted through the prophet Elisha and the waters of the Jordan and out of gratitude makes a commitment to worship the God of Israel. The Samaritan leper takes us a step further, recognizing that God has acted through Jesus and he offers gratitude and praise to God. The proper response to God's mercy is not presumption that this is what we deserved, but untainted gratitude and pure praise of God for God's saving mercy.

Here is one 75-year-old man's way of living out a spirit of gratitude. He reasoned that the average person lives about seventy-five years. He multiplied 75 times 52 and came up with 3,900 -- which is the number of Saturdays that the average person has in their entire lifetime. It took him until he was fifty-five years old to think about all this in any detail and by that time he had lived through over 2,800 Saturdays. He reasoned that if he lived to be 75, he only had about a thousand of them left to enjoy. So he went to a toy store and bought every single marble they had. He ended up having to visit three toy stores to roundup 1000 marbles. He took them home and put them inside of a large, clear plastic container. Every Saturday since then, he has taken 1 marble out and thrown it away. He found that by

watching the marbles diminish, he focused more on the really important things in life, as there is nothing like watching your time here on this earth run out to help get your priorities straight. One morning, he took the very last marble out of the container. He figured if he makes it until the next Saturday then he has been given a little extra time. And the one thing we can all use is a little more time. His hope is that everyone spends more time with their family and that all have a few more Saturdays to enjoy with gratitude.

The Eucharist that we now celebrate is an expression of faith in the love of God made present in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. We are invited to make of it an expression of joyful praise and worship in obedience to the Word of God

So pray for obedient faith in Jesus, and express that faith through joyful, grateful praise and worship.