

In The Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees

***“There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet;
and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”***

For this, he was almost stoned

This is a comment on our first reading today

Naaman was the commander in the Syrian army

A powerful man

And yet, he was powerless in the face of this disease

After trying everything he could think of

And failing time and again

A slave girl from Judah told him about a prophet who could help him

So he sets off with a company of soldiers

He comes to the ruler of Judah with his request

The ruler of Judah thinks this is a plot to declare war

No one can cure leprosy

So why try?

And why did the commander of another’s army come to him?

When Elisha hears of this, he sends word

Have Naaman wash in the Jordan seven times, and he will be cured

He doesn’t go to Naaman himself

And Naaman is insulted and indigent

Wash in this dirty river? Aren’t the rivers of Syria better?

Aren't they cleaner?

Isn't the water better there?

Forget it; we are going back

Then another servant girl speaks up

If he had told you to do something spectacular

If he had told you to go on a great pilgrimage

If he had told you to wage war and if you win, you would be rewarded

Would you not have done this at the drop of a hat?

Then why not do what he requests?

Something so simple

What can it hurt?

So Naaman accedes to her request

He goes to the Jordan

Plunges in seven times

And he is cured

Because of the faith of these two simple slave girls

One of the most powerful men in the world receives a gift

A gift he could never earn

A gift he could never repay in its fullness

So he returns to Elisha

He offers a gift for Elisha

But is refused

Because Elisha did not cure Naaman, and he knew it

It was by the hand of God that this foreigner was made whole

Naaman realizes this

He knows that no other gods could have done this

He will worship this God only from now on

He knows he cannot remain in Judah

So he asks for some of their soil

So he can stand on their soil and offer sacrifice

No matter where he is

This is where we get the notion of a national embassy

Our embassies, although in foreign lands

Are United States soil

Just as theirs are in our land

So in a real way

When we are in the United States embassy anywhere in the world

We are in the United States

The same for Naaman

Wherever he would go in the world

He would be able to be in Israel

And worship Israel's God

This is all background for our Gospel

The ten lepers approaching Christ

Courageous enough to break the social customs

Brave enough to approach another even though they were unclean

Jesus, Master; have pity on us

And like Elisha

Jesus gives them a simple task

He didn't lay his hands on them

He didn't require they do anything

Only go to the priests and show themselves

Again, we need background to understand what is going on

For the Israelites, the priest is not like what we think today

They were ministers that offered sacrifice to God

But they were more than that

They were a social structure of Israel

There were 12 tribes of Israel, and the family of Levi was one of the 12

This was the family of priests

The priesthood was hereditary,

Much like the royal family in England today

The priests had many roles in society

And one of these as to protect society

Leprosy was a huge problem for society

It was contagious with direct contact

But it was also not understood how it could be contracted

So when someone was thought to have leprosy

They erred on the side of caution

They were declared unclean

They were banished from all of society

Even banished from family

From their synagogue

From any human contact other than fellow lepers

It was the priest's job to declare one unclean

They were the ones to declare someone clean

So to be declared clean was more than a clean bill of health

It was a return to family

A return to the synagogue

A return to a normal life

A life of human contact

As bad as leprosy is

There is something deadlier

Something that takes us not from our families and human society

It takes us from God

Sin

And sin has so many effects in our world

One of them is it twists how we look at the world

We begin to see things as rights and entitlements

Rather than seeing them as they truly are

Gifts from God

Like Naaman before he met Elisha

Like the 9 lepers

They thought they had a right to health

They thought they *deserved a normal* life

We can fall into similar traps

Living lives of entitlements and rights

Things we think we can earn in one way or another

We think not only that we deserve life

It has to be fair

As we determine fairness to be

A right to be happy

As we determine happiness to be

We think we have a right to a long life

A right to good health

A right to peace in our lives

A right to respect

A list as long as our arm

We can lose a sense of gratitude for what we do have

We lose the ability to see the blessings we have been given

To see that everything is a gift

Are we thankful for our parents?

For a roof over our heads for the food they provided

For our clothing and our education

Do we have a heart of gratitude for those that helped us along our way?

For friends, employers or employees

Do we give thanks for our health?

Even when we see the devastating effects of it being taken

Do we give thanks to God for His Church and her teachings?

Even the difficult ones we may struggle to grasp

Contraception, protection of all human life, marriage for one man and one woman

Do we give Him thanks for giving us the grace to grow in our love for Him

For our brothers and sisters

Do we give thanks for the Real Presence?

The body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist

That we can be in constant contact with Christ through the Sacraments

Having a heart of gratitude opens us to a new vision

A vision shared by Naaman and the Samaritan

A vision to see God at work in our lives

As John Paul put it

To see life as gift

A gift we have received

And a gift we are called to give

This is why we have Sunday Mass

To give thanks to God

Not to make Him greater than He already is

Not for His benefit

It is for our benefit

So we can become healed

So we will hear the words spoken to the Samaritan

Stand up and go;

Your faith has saved you