

# Reflections on Sunday's Readings: October 13, 2019

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time [C]

2 Kings 5: 14-17

2 Timothy 2: 8-13

Luke 17: 11-19



## *Unitive Knowing*

### **Introduction**

Naaman, the commander of the army of the King of Aram, is well respected and a strong leader. He comes to Israel though because he has "leprosy," some skin disease that will not go away or be healed. He has heard through a young servant girl from Israel, herself a captive in Aram from an earlier battle, about an Israelite prophet who can heal others.

The King of Aram (the land of Aram is situated on the highlands Northeast of Israel in what is now Syria) sends a letter to the King of Israel asking him to heal Naaman of his leprosy. The King of Israel thinks it may be a ploy to engender another battle because he knows he cannot heal the man. Elisha, the prophet, hears of this dilemma; and he sends word to the king to send Naaman to him so that the God of Israel may be revealed to Naaman.

And so Naaman comes with a full retinue of officers and soldiers, chariots, and gifts of gold, and arrives at the house of Elisha. Elisha, similar to Jesus in the Gospel story today, does not make a big "to do" about this healing himself. He does not come out of his house, but instead he sends word to Naaman to go and wash in the Jordan River seven times.

### Initial Response of Naaman and then Transformation

Naaman is initially angry at this instruction from Elisha. He says 'Couldn't I have washed in one of the rivers in my homeland? Why must I wash in the Jordan River?' Naaman expects Elisha to do some big "incantation" over him and possibly wave his arms over him for his healing. Naaman's arrogance comes to the fore, and he refuses to go and wash in the Jordan River. But his officers and soldiers encourage him to do these simple washings and see what happens. So he does.

Naaman is amazed that he is healed, and his skin is now like a child's skin. And a further healing also comes upon Naaman. He is so grateful for his healing, and he realizes that there is a God and this God has the power to heal him. And this God has reached out to heal **him** and is trustworthy. Naaman realizes in a personal way that God is for him, and this brings about a fuller healing within him. This is a **transformation** from his arrogant resistance and independence to humble acceptance of being loved and a new faith in the God of Israel.

### The Gospel Story in Luke

This too is what is happening in the Gospel story today. Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem with all that this will mean for him there. He is passing between the areas of Samaria and Galilee, between where the Samaritans live and the Jewish population.

A small community of ten persons (Jewish persons and at least one Samaritan) with leprosy, who are drawn into community with one another because of their disease, draw near to Jesus. They stay at a distance because of their possibly contagious disease, but they call out to Jesus for help. They have heard of Jesus because they use the title "Master" that his disciples use for him, and they ask for "mercy." This word "mercy" in the Scriptures has a special meaning. It is **compassion in action**. These lepers are asking Jesus to do something on their behalf. They are asking him to alleviate their suffering, to cure them so they can go back to their families and communities.

Jesus receives them and sends them to the priests who can reinstate them into their communities by testifying that they are healed. He gently sends them on their way ... gifting them with healing as they go and trusting that they will recognize their healings along the way.

While they walk off toward the priests, they realize that they are healed of their leprosy. Try to imagine their joy in these moments as they know now that they can go back to their families and villages and be a part of life there again. They possibly began to run toward where the priests would be in their excitement.

But one of those healed is so overwhelmed by what God has done for him through Jesus that he comes back praising God. He kneels at Jesus' feet and likely grasps his legs in thanksgiving. Here is a transformation at work also. Here we see once again the realization in the healed leper of **God's abundant love for him**. This is a divine moment and a fuller healing and wholeness come to the person. This person "got it." He realizes that in Jesus' eyes he is not a

leper or a Samaritan but a **“beloved one,”** one who is cherished. Jesus’ mercy has “redefined” him in a new reciprocal relationship with Jesus the Master.

### **More than Thanksgiving**

Often we see this Gospel story as a lesson about gratitude, but there is more here. Jesus heals us, and we are rightly grateful. But what he really is inviting us into is the abundant life of being **a beloved**, into a unitive relationship with himself, into communion.

What came back to me through these stories is the insight I discovered in a spirituality book about our “first learnings,” our first experiences of the world around us. These are “unitive, bodily experiences,” a “kinesthetic way of knowing.” It is a very deep, foundational way of knowing that the small child experiences in the interactions with their mother especially. Sometimes this also happens with the father, but especially with the mother.

In the “flow” of the interactions between the child and the mother, and other sensitive adults too, as we coo with the child and make faces and speak “baby talk” to them, the child knows it is loved, cherished, precious, and one with the mother (or the significant adult). This is foundational learning for the child as they know their worth and their communion with another. This will enable the child to go out into the world with confidence, with courage, and with the security that overall the world is gracious and safe.

This kind of “communion knowing” is also the kind of knowing that the Scriptures say God has with us and wants with us. It is possibly best experienced in the love shared between lovers, especially between husbands and wives, in a committed relationship, a committed partnership, and in deep friendships.

This is what Jesus offers us ... we can **know God, believe in God, in a way that is bodily, unitive, with all that we are.** We are made for ecstasy, for communion, with God and with one another.

### **Conclusion**

This truly is our deepest identity and destiny. Some may not receive this gift at the beginning of their lives, or some of us may only get part of what we need here with this kind of “communion love.” But God is ever at work gifting us with this kind of “unitive” love, and we can help others receive this by how we love them.

Also, this honestly is what is happening in every Eucharist we celebrate together. We open ourselves and receive this experience of communion with Jesus the Christ every time we come to receive his Word and to share his Body and Blood. This happens within us and among us when we are together like this for “Eucharist,” giving thanks together.

Fr. Henry B. Beck, OFM / St. Francis Retreat House, Easton, PA.