



Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ

sj.mcharlesworth.fr

A homily for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Date: Sunday, October 13, 2019 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: 2 Kings 5:14–17

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 98:1–4 | **Response:** Psalm 98:2b

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8–13

Gospel Acclamation: 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Gospel Reading: Luke 17:11–19

Preached at: the Catholic Church of St Pius X in Mofolo, Soweto **in the** Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Our first reading this morning from the second book of Kings refers to a time about 850 years before Christ when Elisha the prophet took over from Elijah. That story is in the 19th Chapter of the first Book of Kings. At that time the northern kingdom of the Jews was in conflict with the kingdom of the Arameans in Damascus. There was a war going on and the prophet Elisha was involved in advising Damascus. As with some wars, at various times a truce of peace was declared. It is during this truce that Naaman, a Syrian army General, searches out the prophet Elisha to seek a cure for his leprosy. This was not leprosy as we understand it today, but rather some form of skin disease, which probably disfigured him. In any case, we know that it certainly excluded him and made him, and everything he touched, unclean. We can imagine that perhaps he had asked to be cured many times from God already and perhaps that is why he was skeptical of God's power. Naaman, we are told, was disappointed again by God, but his servant convinces him to bathe in the Jordan River. This is a river that runs from the north shore of the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, and Naaman had to pass by two other rivers to get there. He thought those rivers would be better but he

listened to Elisha and was cured in the Jordan River. I think the link with this reading and the lepers in the Gospel is that Naaman comes back to offer thanks to God for being healed, and he even decides to worship God in Syria later.

In our Gospel we hear the story of the ten lepers, who likewise would have been unclean and excluded from Jewish Social society, and we're told of the ten healed, only one returns. Perhaps it's unfair to judge the other nine this way because, after all, it was Jesus who told the ten to go to the priests. They were healed on their journey, not there and then in front of Jesus. It was simply the requirement of the Law that their healing from leprosy be certified by a priest. But one of the lepers, realizing that God was acting through Jesus in a new way so as for himself to be healed, returned to say thank you. It also just happened that this one leper was a foreigner.

This meant that in both stories, it was an outsider, a foreigner, a non-Jew, who could perceive the God of Isaac and Jacob, of Abraham and Moses, of Jesus and you and I, acting in new way in their own life. And not just a person who was different, but one who was unclean – considered unholy. In fact it was precisely the person who was outcast who could see most clearly God's actions. It was in the one who was excluded that the encounter with God occurred.

If we look around the Gospels, this story is only found in Luke's Gospel – and as we know, Luke's Gospel is part 1. Part 2 is the Acts of the Apostles and perhaps this story is the prelude to the saving work that the Apostles do in bringing Jesus to the Gentiles and how they spread God's Good News far beyond the confines of their Jewish faith.

So I think these two readings present us with several questions. Firstly, who are today's lepers? Who are today's unclean? And is it possible that God is already acting in their lives, and in what ways? What can we learn from them? Can we allow ourselves to see God from their point of view. Can we allow ourselves to be surprised by God's goodness?

Secondly, and perhaps more fundamentally, I think we can see two attitudes towards faith here, duty and gratitude.

The Elisha story in our first reading emphasizes Naaman's gratitude on being cured of his leprosy. Once he dipped himself into the Jordan River, he was cleansed. When he tried to show his gratitude to the prophet, he was rebuffed; We're told that Elisha wanted nothing and rightly pointed to God as the source of the cure. Naaman then directed his thanks to God by deciding to offer sacrifice to God in his foreign country. And why did he take two mule-loads of earth you might be wondering? Because in those times sacrifice was acceptable only when offered on sacred soil, and so because he wants to pray to Israel's God in his home country, Naaman takes the earth from Israel back to his home so that he can worship there. But can you see that Gratitude is the underlying theme in the first reading?

And it's the same in the Gospel. A foreigner, a Samaritan – who we know were despised by the Jews – is the one to return and say thank you. Again, gratitude. All that was required was to show himself to the priest, but this man sensed that something great had happened in his life and he knew that it was from God. And so he went beyond the law and acted from his heart, to say thank you.

I think duty sets out the minimum requirements for one's faith – but one does not truly live it spontaneously unless one lives it from one's heart and, in that sense, allow oneself to be grateful.

That is our challenge today. Do we only live out our faith dutifully, reporting to the priest when we have to because that is what the law said, or attending Mass once a week because we have to... or do we do so joyfully and gratefully saying thank you to God because we recognize what God has done for us. Where in our lives do we put the emphasis? I think for too many of us we emphasize duty over gratitude. But Jesus is telling us that our burden is lighter in this life if we live from an attitude of gratitude.

When we find ourselves having to choose between what is right and wrong, do we just choose the right choice because we know that's the law? Or do we choose the right thing out of a sense of gratitude for God's goodness and mercy

to us? I think if we do the latter we will find choosing the right thing easier. We will look for God's will in our lives because we are grateful and trusting that God's will is always going to be not only the right choice, but the best choice too.

And isn't that what we hear in our second reading today? St Paul tells us that "The word of God is not chained." And certainly it should not be a chain of death and duty round us. God's word is freeing and liberating. Paul bears, we read, "everything for the sake of those who are chosen" in order that salvation and eternal glory may be theirs. Even with all our infidelities, Christ remains faithful to us and invites us to always say Yes to the Father. Christ's resurrection is the promise that we must live not focused on sin and death, but on the joy and hope of the resurrection. And God is doing something new in all of our lives, if we take the time to notice and say thank you.

When we see that everything we have and experience is a gift from God, freely given to us who do not deserve such goodness, then how can we deny God's goodness to us? How can we not be grateful? How can we not say thank you. For if we think about it, the psalm is correct, the Lord has done marvelous things and we should make a joyful noise to the Lord, yes! the earth should "break forth into joyous song and sing praises!"

And I think that is what we do when we come to Mass – or at least, it is what we should try to do. We come together this morning to listen to the word of God, and to share in the Eucharist. Eucharist literally means thanks giving. But I think not all of us here receive the Eucharist from a position of being grateful. Every time we start the Eucharist the priest says: "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God."

But do we really give thanks? Perhaps today, may I ask you to close your eyes for a minute and just think of all the things you are grateful to God for today. Perhaps it is for some healing or blessing in your life? Perhaps it is for a member of your family, a loved one? Perhaps it is for your job or for something someone else did for you this week. Whatever it is, acknowledge it and see God's hand in gifting that to you.

I think that it is unfortunate that too many of us leave our problems, our cares, our concerns, our worries and dreams at the church door. When we celebrate the Eucharist properly, however, we must bring all of ourselves to God.

Because our liturgy invites us to bring those cares and concerns to the table of word and sacrament and allow God to transform them.

And if we can bring our cares and concerns, our worries and our problems, we can, and we must, also bring our grateful hearts, our reasons for thanks, so that they too can be united in this liturgy which is a great act of thanksgiving, and of praise and worship to God who is the source of all goodness in our lives.

So let us pray today that we might be grateful. Let us bring all of ourselves to God today. Let us pray that we might see all the many things that God has blessed us with, and that we might truly say thank you to God today as we share this meal at the table of the Lord.

Amen.

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