

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Oct 13th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

We are invited to pray with and reflect upon several important Christian gifts in today's readings. We pray for the grace of true humility which frees us to tell ourselves and others our true condition. Humility is honesty and such truthfulness will eventually bring about a healing somewhere in our lives.

We pray also for the faith that what has been hurtful in our pasts does not have to accompany us into a disabled future. Physical healing may take time and often those injuries or debilitations remain, no matter how intensely we pray. The interior hurts, especially our angers at our not being physically healed, can, with faith, be tempered, softened, and even let pass.

Faith can heal such angers and frustrations and the result is the freedom to be grateful. Being grateful is only the beginning, Jesus came to free us all from and free us for the new, the adventure of praise and trust. We are offered in these readings, and in the Eucharist, invitations to return in faith and then return in thanksgiving.

REFLECTION

We hear just a little bit of a wonderful story in today's First Reading. It would help if the whole of chapter five of Second Kings would be read. Naaman is a commander of a foreign king to whom the Lord granted a victory. Naaman has leprosy and his wife's servant girl, who was taken from Israel earlier, tells her mistress that if Naaman would go to the "man of God" in Israel, Naaman would be healed. Naaman gets permission from his king and goes in search of Elisha.

Naaman is simply told by Elisha to bathe in the river Jordan. Naaman refuses, thinking rivers in his own home land would be better than the Jordan in this foreign land of Israel. He begins returning home, but his servants beg him to just "do it". He reconsiders and bathes seven times and is cured. So what we hear in today's First Reading is his return humbly and gratefully to Elisha.

Naaman wants to give something in response, but Elisha refuses that. So Naaman begs for two carloads of dirt from the holy land of Israel to take back to his own land and thereby be in union with the God of Israel and the God of his being cured. It is a great story.

The Gospel relates a more familiar story which has an important twist. Ten lepers shout for healing and when they receive this gift, only one returns shouting his praise. The twist is more complicated than that the healed person is a Samaritan, a foreigner. Luke is working with Jesus' teaching his apostles about what going up to Jerusalem is going to mean. It is stated simply in the first verse that "Jesus was continuing his journey to Jerusalem." The apostles will learn that they, themselves, are outcasts, will be rejected, and exiled from their Jewish pasts.

Living thanks is more important than giving thanks. The Samaritan returns and he represents the universal embrace which Jesus has come to share. The other nine are healed and represent the apostles who will be scattered as Jerusalem approaches. They too will be gathered again and form the beginning of the "Kingdom" about which we will hear in the following weeks. This story is a bit of a link between Jesus' having been confronting the Pharisees about their being, rich, oppressive, and aloof and the true nature of following Jesus. Being members of Jesus' kingdom will involve being considered as lepers and Jesus will be the one who heals. Those who come to the awareness that they are lepers will find healing in Jesus. They will be grateful living the healing touch extended through them to others.

Naaman and the leper from Samaria are non-belongers. They both leave their state of alienation and experience being healed through coming to the "Holy Land" of God. Naaman gives thanks by taking some of the Holy Ground back with him. The cured-leper returns to Jesus as "Holy Land" and gives thanks for now belonging.

So back to the Pharisees. They are the new "non-belongers" and those once alienated are now members of the "kingdom". Perhaps the major difference has to do with "humility". Jesus asks about the other "nine". I imagine that they were not ungrateful, but more likely not humble enough to admit that once they were outside — different, unwelcomed. They would have to live with their pasts into their futures. The "Kingdom" is for those who stand in their earthliness which has been blessed by the "Holy Land" who is Jesus. The Pharisees stand always at a distance greater than that of the lepers when they sought cleansing. It is not so much about who gave thanks and who did not. Jesus is dedicated to calling all of humanity away from the leprosy of self-righteous pharisaic posturing. Jesus is the Land upon which, and within which we do not posture, but take positions of living our healed conditions.

Here is a little thought. The "nine" represent most Christians - at least in this. They enjoy being freed from leprosy, but lose contact with the reality of their having been outsiders, alienated, defined by something negative. They might be grateful, but they are not sure grateful for what.

The “one” returnee represents each of us when coming to our senses; we get in touch with what it means to be redeemed by Jesus. We get in touch with our soul’s sicknesses. We touch into how disordered, depressed, angry, and/or violent we once were and immersing ourselves seven or more times in the river of the redeeming Jesus, we both enjoy the freedom from and the freedom for the living out of his touch.

“The rich suffer want and go hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no blessing.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.