

The Ten Lepers

Twentieth-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2 Kgs 5:14-17 / Lk 17:11-19
Ave Maria Catholic Church, October 9, 2022 – Fr. David M Vidal

Today's readings direct our attention to the healing power of God. The book of Kings relates the healing of the leper Naaman. Then, the Gospel of St. Luke presents the healing of the ten lepers.

Let us consider first, what leprosy meant in the Old Testament.

Leprosy was a most dreadful disease. The leper suffered in numerous ways. He had to carry the effects of the disease on his skin, but that was not the end of the evils he would have to endure. The leper had to publicly admit the shame of the disease "*wearing torn clothes*" and announcing his presence with the words "*unclean, unclean,*" (see Lev 13:45). Even more, the leper was forced to be separated from the rest of the people, "*outside the camp,*" (see Lev 13:46).

In the Old Testament, in the second book of Kings, we also find the story of Naaman, the leper. Naaman was a commander of the army of Syria. He was a good commander and had the favor of the king. When Naaman came down with leprosy, the king of Aram sent a letter to the king of Israel, saying: "*With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy.*" When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his garments and exclaimed: "*Am I a god with power over life and death, that this man should send someone for me to cure him of leprosy?*" (2 Kings 5: 6–7). The miracle of being cured of leprosy was considered as great as the miracle of life. Therefore, only God had the power for such a healing.

Then, Elisha (the prophet of God) sent a message to Naaman: "*Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will heal, and you will be clean,*" (2 Kings 5:10)

Naaman went away angry, saying, "*I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand there to call on the name of the LORD his God, and would move his hand over the place, and thus cure the leprous spot. Are not the rivers of Damascus . . . better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be cleansed?*" With that, he turned about in anger and left. (2 Kings 5: 11–12).

However, the wise advice of a servant made Naaman come to his senses: "*If the prophet told you to do something extraordinary, would you not do it? All the more since he told you, 'Wash, and be clean'?*" (2 Kings 5: 13).

Then, Naaman went to the Jordan river, did what the prophet told him to do, and the leprosy left him. Not only that, but he also became a believer.

Let us consider now, the encounter between the ten lepers and Jesus.

Those lepers had the obligation to announce their presence by shouting: “Unclean, unclean!” However, they did something different. Standing at a distance from Jesus, they raised their voices, saying, *“Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!”*

As we recall, the people of Israel understood that healing leprosy was a divine action that required a divine power. We read in the gospels how Jesus worked many miracles, also called “signs.” And the healing of leprosy is one of these “signs” that reveals that He is the Messiah.

Then, we hear how Jesus, with great authority, accepts the request and says: *“Go show yourselves to the priests.”* And on their way, they were cleansed.

Ten were clean, and only one returned to give thanks. Ten received the physical sign of healing, but only one accepted in faith the spiritual transformation. That man fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. And Jesus told him: *“Your faith has saved you.”*

Finally, let us apply these passages to our lives.

The physical disease of leprosy is an image of the spiritual leprosy of sin.

The leper was considered impure, according to Mosaic Law. He had the obligation to publicly say: “unclean, unclean”. Sin is also “impurity” in a moral sense. Sin, as the leprosy of the soul, corrupts the spiritual life of a person, creating deformity, and ugliness, covering that person with spiritual shame and disgrace.

Even more, like leprosy, sin is not only the origin of personal struggles but also of social evils. Sin establishes division among people.

Jesus comes to us to heal our infirmities and heal our souls. In the Gospel, we read that Jesus continued on his journey to Jerusalem. He was preaching the coming of the kingdom of God and healing diseases and infirmities. But most especially, he was traveling to Jerusalem, where he was going to give his life on the Cross, to cure our worst disease: our separation from God through sin.

From today’s readings, we should learn the following:

First of all, we must humbly acknowledge our condition as sinners.

Lepers humbly recognized their condition saying: “Unclean, unclean.” We must also recognize our condition as sinners. We should confess with the Palmist: *“I acknowledged*

my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord;' then you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Ps 32:5).

Second, we must have a fervent desire for purification.

The lepers raised their voices, saying, "*Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!*" Their desire is more than a wish. With determination, they come to Jesus. With determination, they shout with persistence.

We should have the same conviction and determination. Holiness is a greater gift, much greater than physical fitness or physical health. With great desire, we must raise our voices in supplication and say: "*Jesus, have pity on me.*"

Third, we must trust in God who knows better how to heal us from our sins

In today's gospel we heard that when Jesus healed the ten lepers, he said: "*Go show yourselves to the priests,*" and on the way, they were healed. (Luke 17:14).

Perhaps, those ten lepers could have said like Naaman: "*We were hoping that he would say a word, raise his hands, and heal us. Why should we go to the priests?*" However, they went, and they were healed on their way!

Do we not act like Naaman when we say: "Why should I pray, why should I go to Church, why should I go to a priest, why should I receive the sacraments of the Church? Why should avoid this action or do this another action? I want to be healed, but I want to be healed on my terms and in my way!"

Is that wise? Are we the doctor or the patient? If we are the patient, we must humbly say: "*O Lord, heal me in Your Way!*" God knows what we need. We should discover through all these sensible signs the invisible hand of God that protects us, heals us, and leads us to Him.

Let us admit that we need the help of the Divine Physician. Let us ask for His grace. Let us accept His medicine. Amen