

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Naaman = NAY-uh-muhn
Elisha = ee-Lĭ-shuh

Take time describing this ritual action; then, pause before announcing his cleansing.

Narrate with the attitude of rejoicing and gratitude that must have filled Naaman's heart.

This is a remarkable (and risky) profession of faith for this pagan official.

No hint of rudeness or superiority, just confidence that he has done his duty.

Take time with these details. Show a connection between his desire for the soil and his determination to worship only the God of Israel.

LECTIONARY #144

READING I 2 Kings 5:14-17

A reading from the second Book of Kings

Naaman went down and plunged into the Jordan seven times at the word of Elisha, the man of God.

His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean of his leprosy.

Naaman returned with his whole retinue to the man of God.

On his arrival he stood before Elisha and said,

"Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel.

Please accept a gift from your servant."

Elisha replied, "As the LORD lives whom I serve, I will not take it,"

and despite Naaman's urging, he still refused.

Naaman said: "If you will not accept,

please let me, your servant, have two mule-loads of earth, for I will no longer offer holocaust or sacrifice to any other god except to the LORD."

READING I

Naaman was a commander of the army of the king of Aram, highly respected and valued by the king even though he was a leper. Having heard that there was a powerful prophet in Israel, the Aramean king sent a letter to the king of Israel requesting that he cure Naaman of his leprosy. Dismayed and fearful, Israel's king, knowing he had no power over life and death, saw the request as an excuse to quarrel. But Elisha the prophet, hearing of the king's distress, told him to send Naaman to him.

When Naaman met Elisha, the prophet gave him simple instructions: wash seven times in the Jordan River. Enraged at the request, stating that the waters of his own country were better than the waters of Israel, Naaman at first refused. When his servants convinced him to undergo the washing, Naaman relented, and plunged into the Jordan seven times.

The scene in today's reading reveals not only Naaman's cleansing from leprosy, but also his transformation from arrogant resistance to humble acceptance, and his new faith in the God of Israel. The sevenfold

plunging is symbolic of total cleansing. So complete is his cleansing and his allegiance that he offers a gift to Elisha. Elisha's refusal of Naaman's gift is a sign that the Lord alone is worthy of such honors. In fact, Elisha was not even present at Naaman's healing, accomplished by God's own power. Naaman's final request is to take two mule-loads of earth from Israel. Cured in Israel's waters, Naaman will offer sacrifices only on Israel's "land," symbolized by the earth that he takes back with him. The God of Israel can then be worshiped in Naaman's distant country.

For meditation and context:

TO KEEP IN MIND
 Pray the text, using your favorite method of praying with Scripture.

Beloved = bee-LUHV-uhd

A slight pause after “remember” and moving slowly through the sentence will highlight this important opening.

Paul is imprisoned for his faith.

Contrast the freedom enjoyed by God’s Word to go where it will.

This is a joyful declaration: he suffers willingly for the good of others!

Be sure to balance “died”/“live” and “persevere”/“reign.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 98:1, 2–3, 3–4 (see 2b)

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

Sing to the LORD a new song,
 for he has done wondrous deeds;
 his right hand has won victory for him,
 his holy arm.

All the ends of the earth have seen
 the salvation by our God.
 Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands:
 break into song; sing praise.

The LORD has made his salvation known:
 in the sight of the nations he has revealed
 his justice.
 He has remembered his kindness and his
 faithfulness
 toward the house of Israel.

READING II 2 Timothy 2:8–13

A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to Timothy

Beloved:

**Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead,
 a descendant of David:
 such is my gospel, for which I am suffering,
 even to the point of chains, like a criminal.**

But the word of God is not chained.

**Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those
 who are chosen,
 so that they too may obtain the salvation that is
 in Christ Jesus,
 together with eternal glory.**

This saying is trustworthy:

**If we have died with him
 we shall also live with him;
 if we persevere
 we shall also reign with him. >>**

READING II

The second reading opens and closes with succinct affirmations of faith. The first one is a short presentation of Paul’s own Gospel that expresses the core of Christian faith: Jesus Christ, raised from the dead. As a descendant of David, Jesus is the Christ, the anointed one who brings to fulfillment God’s ancient promises. Paul’s imprisonment is a participation in the death and Resurrection of Jesus, the anointed one; like Jesus, Paul bears his suffering so that others may also share in salvation. As believers await eternal glory, they already

have a share in salvation; even now they have a down payment of what they await.

Paul’s second affirmation of faith, a trustworthy saying, is a poetic verse with the feel of a liturgical hymn, perhaps used at Baptism or as baptismal catechesis. As he does elsewhere in his letters, Paul inserts the hymn into his instructions, thereby drawing on what his audience already knows to reinforce his own teaching. The teaching addressed to Timothy is meant for the whole community.

Believers’ immersion into Christ’s death and Resurrection in Baptism means

that they have died with him and are risen to new life. This saying expresses both a present reality and promise of a future fulfillment. After announcing the fundamental belief of dying and rising with Christ, the remaining verses add how believers are to live: in perseverance and fidelity. The final verse contrasts human infidelity with God’s absolute faithfulness. For God to be unfaithful would be a denial of God’s very nature.

GOSPEL

In the first reading, Naaman was a single foreign leper

Note the suggestions for placing stress. Paul says that Christ remains faithful to himself and God; his righteousness requires that he judge our unfaithfulness.

Let your tone suggest the serious nature of his journey.

Samaria = suh-MAYR-ee-uh

The Law required this distance. Raise your volume.

"When he saw them" should suggest his immediate compassion.

The priests had to authenticate cures of leprosy.

Is their reaction marked by joy, awe, gratitude?

We should hear the joy of the healed Samaritan in this narration.

Remember, Jesus admires the Samaritan. He regrets that the others did not come to claim a greater healing.

Make these words sincere and full of assurance.

But if we deny him
he will deny us.
If we are unfaithful
he remains faithful,
for he cannot deny himself.

GOSPEL Luke 17:11-19

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem,
he traveled through Samaria and Galilee.
As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him.
They stood at a distance from him and raised their voices, saying,
"Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!"
And when he saw them, he said,
"Go show yourselves to the priests."
As they were going they were cleansed.
And one of them, realizing he had been healed,
returned, glorifying God in a loud voice;
and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.
He was a Samaritan.
Jesus said in reply,
"Ten were cleansed, were they not?
Where are the other nine?
Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?"
Then he said to him, "Stand up and go;
your faith has saved you."

who was cleansed. In the Gospel, the horror of the disease and the power of the cure are magnified: ten lepers are afflicted, and ten are healed. Having traveled through Samaria and Galilee, Jesus meets these lepers as he enters an unnamed village. While Jews and Samaritans ordinarily did not associate with one another, their ethnic and religious identity were obliterated by the disease of leprosy as they traveled together. They must stand at a distance even from Jesus as they cry out to him, addressing him as Master (*epistates*), a title

that Jesus' disciples used. They beg, not for alms, but for Jesus' pity or mercy (*eleeson*) on them.

Jesus' response to them resonates with the account of Naaman and Elisha. Both Elisha and Jesus command the lepers to go away for their cleansing. Neither Elisha nor Jesus are actually present when the lepers are healed. And like Naaman, the Samaritan, a foreigner and an outcast, offers thanks. Both Naaman and the healed Samaritan recognize that God's hand is at work in the healings. The Samaritan offers

no gift as Naaman had done, but his expression of faith is expansive. He glorifies God, falls at Jesus' feet, and thanks him.

This account, unique to Luke's Gospel, develops several important Lukan themes: the role of Jesus as a powerful prophet; the merciful action of God present in Jesus; the praise and thanks that is due to God; and the inclusion of foreigners in God's saving deeds. E.P.