

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 9 October 2022

Scriptures: 2 Kings 5:14-17; 2 Timothy 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19

Homily: Fr. Ken

One theme in our readings today is that of religious faith and genuine gratitude. In the first reading, the leper Naaman is cured of his illness, and then believes in God. In the second reading from the 2nd letter to Timothy, St. Paul encourages us to remain firm and steadfast in our religious faith. In the Gospel reading from St. Luke, we have the well-known story of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus, but only one of them—a Samaritan and an outsider—returned to thank Jesus for the gift of healing.

In those scripture readings we encounter people who express gratitude to God because they have received the blessings of God and are able to recognize them as such.

The leprosy spoken of in the Bible is not Hansen's disease, the form of the disease with which we are familiar today from medical textbooks and from the stories of Father Damian of Molokai.

In the time of Jesus, the term leprosy was used to describe a large number of skin diseases. It was much feared because of the stigma associated with it which led to social isolation and separation from the community. Associated with leprosy was the Jewish understanding of being unclean and therefore not holy. Healings were also associated with liberation from sin and making one clean and holy so that one could be restored into the community and reintegrated into life.

The one leper who returned to thank Jesus was a Samaritan. The other nine, outcasts on the borders of Samaria and Galilee, may have been Jews or Samaritans who were united by their common exclusion and separation from their own peoples. Samaritans and

Jews were usually local enemies because of the long historical conflict between them. Jesus reaches out to cure Samaritans as well as Jews. He touches them and makes them clean. He treats them as equals and shows them respect and dignity.

In the Old Testament, Naaman was commander of the armies of the king Aram in Syria. He suffered from a skin disease. Probably a Syrian, he too places his trust in the God of Israel and, following the command of Elisha, is healed of his affliction.

The promise of God reaches beyond the Jewish people to all who welcome it. In prison, St. Paul invites us to hold him firm and trust in the God who has loved us and is revealed to us through the face of Jesus Christ. Even in adversity, he is thankful to God and grateful for all he has received.

We today are invited to grow in gratitude for the gifts we have received, and become people who give thanks to God, and then share our faith with others through service and love.

Two people who rejoiced in their Catholic faith and dedicated their lives to caring for lepers in the 19th century were, of course, the Flemish priest, Father Damien of Molokai, now a canonized saint, and also the more recently canonized St. Marianne Cope from the United States. She went to Molokai and cared for Fr. Damien at the end of his life, and stayed to care for the lepers.

God's word in these scriptures invites us to be confident in speaking out and telling other people of the good news we have received. We are called to be God's witnesses.

We can ask ourselves this question: Can I trust God enough to allow me to tell someone else about a blessing I have received from God? God's mercy extends beyond the boundaries that we create in our minds, and includes all people.

We pray that we may always be open to receive the stranger or the person on the margins of society. In doing this, we do truly witness to God's love.