

Homily for Sunday, October 12, 2025



You probably know that the readings we hear, on any given Sunday, are the same readings proclaimed in every Catholic church throughout the world. This revised common lectionary (R.C.L.) is also used by many other Christian denominations

and acts to unite us. Also, as you probably figured out, there's usually a connection between the first reading and gospel passage. Let's see if these two readings have something to say to us on our faith journey.

The first reading mentions an Old Testament prophet named Elisha who lived over 800 years before the birth of Jesus. He is a Jewish prophet living and preaching in Israel. The neighbouring country is Syria, and archenemy of Israel. On one of their raids into Israel, the Syrian king captures and brings back a Jewish girl. This girl becomes a servant to Naaman, the highest ranking general under the king of Syria. At some point, Naaman contracts leprosy. This servant girl tells Naaman that back in her country of Israel, there is a powerful prophet named Elisha who could cure him of his skin disease. Reluctantly, Naaman crosses over into Israel, enemy territory, to seek out the Jewish prophet, Elisha. He knocks on the prophet's door expecting the prophet come out and see him, after all, he is an important general.

Unfortunately, Naaman comes at the wrong time. Elisha was watching “The Price is Right” and didn’t want to be disturbed, even by an important general. So, Elisha tells his servant to tell the guy at the door that if he wanted to be healed of leprosy he was to immerse himself in the Jordan River seven times. That should do the trick.

Naaman is furious. He has humbled himself to take the advice of a Jewish servant girl, he goes to an “enemy” country to a Jewish prophet who won’t answer the door in person, and now he is to bathe in the Jordan River! He protested that they have way better rivers back in Syria than this mudhole they call the Jordan. His servants convinced Naaman to just do it anyways. Grudgingly, Naaman bathes in the Jordan River and is cured of his leprosy. He is so overjoy that he wants to go back and find the prophet Elisha to thank him and offer him a gift. This time Elisha answers the door but refuses to take any gift whatsoever. ***“I will accept nothing!”*** Naaman says, “If you will not accept a gift from me, will you give me permission to take two mule-loads of earth back to Syria?” Naaman, the once-proud pagan general, wanted to worship the one, true God who was working through Elisha, and he wanted to do it on Jewish soil.

God’s healing power came to a pagan general whose heart was opened only a small crack, a crack hardly the size of a mustard seed, to quote last Sunday’s gospel. God’s healing wasn’t reserved only for law-abiding Jews. It wasn’t reserved for people who are in a state of grace. It was given to one, who by all accounts, who was in a state of disgrace—Naaman.

That's the nature of God's Spirit. It blows like the wind and has no regard for borders or boundaries. It just seeks to enter the smallest of cracks of our armor and bring us healing.

The gospel story is in the same vein. The opening line is very telling. ***On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee.*** Jerusalem is not only the place of the crucifixion but also the place of Jesus' great love for us, a love that won't run from suffering nor death. On the road to suffering he will travel through the region between Samaria and Galilee. Jesus is "in-between," neither in Samaria nor in Galilee. He's in no-man's land. The people who live in no-man's land are the outcasts of society, their society and ours. These lepers have been kicked out of society and out of church. They are banned from living among people; society won't have them. And they are banned from entering Temple or synagogue; Church won't have them. Although Jesus himself does not have leprosy he, nevertheless, enters fully into the world of the lepers. For all intents and purposes Jesus makes himself a leper. At the end of his earthly life, Jesus, too, will be banned, by church and state, and crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem. Before this rejection happens, Jesus has already learned what it means to live a life of banishment. But this is Jesus' destiny. He is the quintessential border walker. The strip of land between Samaria and Galilee is the place where God meets all people, especially the broken and rejected of society and those who don't feel welcomed in Church.

As much as leprosy is disfiguring and as much as crucifixion must surely be painful, I think rejection and loneliness are even worse. It's into that world that Jesus

brings healing and, more importantly, a sense of communion. Leprosy says, “You will never belong until and unless a priest deems you worthy.” Jesus says, “You always belong to God. Come you who are thirsty—thirsty for anything. Come. And you, who have no money, come to the table where the food is free” (Is. 55).

Notice the healing of these lepers didn’t happen instantly, nor in the presence of Jesus. It took place “off camera” after they had left Jesus and while they were on the way to showing themselves to the priest at the Temple. Jesus takes no credit for their healing. He tells them that **“their faith has made them well.”** Jesus isn’t looking for any credit or praise. Jesus’ only concern is that we be made whole. He knows, like the prophet Elisha knew, that he wasn’t the source of peoples’ healing, only a humble channel. That’s why Elisha didn’t answer the door when Naaman came knocking. He didn’t want Naaman to think he had any power to heal him, only God did. And that’s why Elisha refused to receive any gift from Naaman afterwards for fear that Naaman would put him on a pedestal and worship him as some kind of miracle worker. Jesus knew what the prophet Elisha knew--that God is the source of all healing, and the rest of us strive to be channels of that healing.

In his first public speech Jesus remind us that there is a light in each of us that needs to shine and not be hidden. This light is for the healing and salvation of the world. When people see this in you, they’ll trace that light to its source, to your Father in heaven. Then, like the grateful leper, they will give glory not to you but to your Father in heaven.

One of the many people whose life gave glory to God was a Belgian priest who became known as St. Damien of Molokai. He chose to go to Hawaii as a missionary, in the mid-19th century. After being there for five years, he felt called to go and serve the people quarantined on the adjacent Island of Molokai; on that island was the leper colony. One day, 11 years into it, he inadvertently put his foot in scalding water but felt nothing, the unmistakable sign of leprosy. Five years later, at the age of 49, he died of the disease. What change for him in those five years? “Nothing,” according to him except instead of starting his homily off with, “You, lepers...” he now began with, “We lepers...” In 2009 he was declared a saint, the saint of lepers and outcasts. Damien lived and died in no-man’s land.

Jesus still walks among us between every Samaria and Galilee, between every sorrow and joy, between poverty and riches, between sickness and health. He hears the cries of the outcasts calling out, ***“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!”*** He’s there not by chance but by choice. As he walks through no-man’s land he turns it into “everyman’s” and “everywoman’s” land just as he always did before.

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