

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - 2 Kings 5:14-17

The books of Kings chronicle the period of time between roughly 970 B.C. through 587 B.C.; the reign of Solomon, through the division of the kingdom into Judah and Israel, and then the Babylonian occupation and the destruction of the temple and the exile of the people of God. 1st and 2nd Kings in fact form one continuous work with the division arbitrarily disrupting the account of the reign of Ahaziah of Israel. Although it spans almost 400 years in a chronological manner, it is not a work of political or social history, but one of theological history. It recounts from a consistent theological point of view, Israel's life in its own land from the end of David's reign to the Babylonian exile. It is less interested in accurately chronicling events, no matter how important they may seem to the modern historian, than in explaining the tragic fate of Yahweh's people. The sources used by the sacred author are many and varied, ranging from popular tales (1 Kings 3:16-27) and miracle stories (2 Kings 2) to archival records (1 Kings 4:7-19). In Kings, the sacred author repeatedly refers the reader to three sources by name for further information: The Acts of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41), The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (1 Kings 14:29), and The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel (1 Kings 14:19). Unfortunately, all three are now lost, although references to them are in 40 verses of Holy Scripture.

Today's reading takes place sometime around 850 B.C. when Elisha is the prophet and describes Elisha as the master of leprosy. Naaman, king of Damascus and captain of the army of the King of Syria, has contracted leprosy. Some time earlier, his army had taken a young Israelite girl as captive and she is now Naaman's wife's servant. This girl advises her mistress to have Naaman go to see the prophet in Samaria (Elisha) for a cure. Naaman got permission from his king and a letter of introduction to the King of Israel, and departed taking with him ten talents of silver (about 750 pounds), 6000 shekels of gold (about 150 pounds) and ten sets of clothes. The letter of introduction read "I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of leprosy." Upon reading the letter, the Israelite king became very upset because he thought the Syrian king was trying to pick a quarrel with him by giving him an impossible task – one only God could perform. Upon hearing of the king's distress, Elisha sent him a note to have Naaman "come to him so he will know there is a prophet in Israel." Upon meeting Elisha, Naaman is told to go wash himself seven times in the Jordan and he will be cured. Naaman went away angry. He had expected to have the prophet invoke the name of God, wave his hand over the affected area, and he would be cured. Instead, he is told to wash in a dirty river – surely the rivers of Damascus are cleaner. Naaman's servants however convinced him to try the cure; after all, if the prophet had told him to do some great thing he would have done it.

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

Seven is the number of the covenant. A complete washing.

His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. ¹⁵ He returned with his whole retinue to the man of God. On his arrival he stood before him and said, “Now I know

Before this event, he had doubted – to the point of beginning to return to the land of Damascus.

that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel.

The dirty waters of Israel have effected a cure.

Please accept a gift from your servant.”

Presumably the gold and silver (about \$750,000 worth at today’s prices).

¹⁶ “As the LORD lives whom I serve, I will not take it,” Elisha replied; and despite Naaman’s urging, he still refused.

Acceptance would suggest that it was Elisha’s own powers that had effected the cure.

¹⁷ 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.

Naaman states a common ancient conception that linked and limited a deity to some particular territory (see Psalm 137:4). If Naaman is to worship Yahweh in Damascus, he must take some of Yahweh’s domain with him, hence the two mule-loads of earth. This way, he can build his altar on Yahweh’s domain when he worships the true God in Damascus, his home city.

2nd Reading - 2 Timothy 2:8-13

As we continue with our study of 2nd Timothy, we find Saint Paul describing the sufferings of the Christian apostle and the hope that he has.

⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David:

Emphasizes the messianic kingship of Jesus.

such is my gospel,

The good news. By His victory over death He has shown Himself to be the Son of God (see Romans 1:4).

⁹ for which I am suffering, even to the point of chains, like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained.

Because there are other preachers. Also, Paul has been able to spread the word even as a prisoner.

“But now God has made us such that nothing can subdue us. Our hands are bound but not our tongue, since nothing can bind the tongue but cowardice and unbelief. Where these are not, though you fasten chains upon us, the preaching of the gospel is not bound.” [Saint John Chrysostom (between A.D. 393-397), *Homilies on the Second Epistle to Timothy* 4]

¹⁰ Therefore, I bear with everything for the sake of those who are chosen,

His sufferings are of value for those chosen for Christianity, both those already Christians and those not yet converted.

so that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, together with eternal glory.

¹¹ This saying is trustworthy:

The saying is sure. Paul draws attention to the fundamental truth.

If we have died with him we shall also live with him;

Refers back to verse 8. When Paul speaks of dying with Christ and rising with Him, he has in mind not only the mystical death and resurrection of baptism, but also the development of this experience in the Christian life, with special emphasis on the physical sufferings and dangers of the apostolate, the final stage of this assimilation with Christ taking place at the parousia.

“The Savior, too, first granted you this very thing – that you should fall. You were a Gentile. Let the Gentile in you fall. You loved prostitutes. Let the lover of prostitutes in you perish first. You were a sinner. Let the sinner in you fall. Then you can rise again and say, ‘If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him,’ and, ‘If we have been made like Him in death, we shall also be like Him in resurrection.” [Origen (after A.D. 233), *Homilies on Luke* 17,3]

¹² if we persevere we shall also reign with him. But if we deny him

Such a denial would mean infidelity to Christ.

he will deny us.

Christ’s denial would be a refusal to recognize a man at the judgement as one of His followers.

¹³ If we are unfaithful he remains faithful,

Either to His promise to punish or to His promise to show love and mercy.

for he cannot deny himself.

He is unchangeable in His very nature.

Gospel - Luke 17:11-19

Our gospel reading this week takes over where our reading left off last week. Last week we heard of the inward renewal of disciples. Today we begin the conclusion of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

**¹¹ As he [Jesus] continued his journey to Jerusalem, he traveled through Samaria and Galilee.
¹² As he was entering a village, ten lepers met (him).**

Persons with skin diseases were not clean or holy and were isolated. They could not go to synagogue or Temple. Anyone who touched an unclean person became unclean themselves. These ten are separated from everything – including their kinsmen.

They stood at a distance from him ¹³ and raised their voice,

Being careful to avoid making someone unclean, they stay away. Misery so loves company that this group consists of both Jews and one Samaritan (with whom Jews normally did not deal).

saying, “Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!” ¹⁴ And when he saw them, he said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.”

In compliance with Mosaic law (see Leviticus 14:1-32). The Samaritan most probably would have gone to his own priests at Mt. Gerizim.

As they were going they were cleansed. ¹⁵ And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned,

Naaman (a foreigner in Israel) also returned to Elisha in our 1st reading today.

glorifying God in a loud voice;

He gave glory to God by proclaiming God’s redemptive acts. Not necessarily praising Jesus, but God who sent Him.

¹⁶ and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Jesus said in reply, “Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has saved you.”

Not salvation by faith alone, the Samaritan had to act on that faith and ask for healing. Jesus has restored him to his community and family – he is no longer an outcast. In Jesus, His disciples (us) find the fullness of human wholeness.