

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 28th Sunday -C-
2 Kings 5: 14-17 2 Timothy 2: 8-13 Luke 17:11-19
By Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

You might want to write a few introductory lines for the lector to read before today's first reading, (2 Kings 5: 14-17) since the selection for today is so out of context. A little background might help. Or, if you are preaching from this reading, you might have to include some background in the preaching. Remember though, preaching is not a bible class, just give the information that will help you communicate your message.

Naaman is a foreigner and his healing brings out the universal salvation inherent in the Jewish tradition. Even though there seems little hope for Israel, it is so insignificant and weak at this time, God still chooses this people to be God's instruments of healing for others. The preacher might focus on Naaman's desire to take home "two mule loads of earth" from Israel. It's a strange request to our ears and might arouse curiosity. At that time people associated gods with specific places, and Naaman sees his cure coming from the God of Israel, the God of this particular land. The land, the place of encounter, is sacred; but this God is available to all, even those outside the confines of one place or one religion. Naaman doesn't have to take the soil, God can travel without it to any people. The homily could reflect on the sacred places where we experience the healing of God. Some of these are places we traditionally have called "sacred", like churches, chapels, synagogues, retreat houses, etc. These places bring rest and healing to anxious and hurt spirits.

But there are other "sacred places" as well. The persons, groups or places that have been healing encounters for us are sacred places. In these places God has come to heal us. The preacher will want to give examples, e.g. a trusted confidant who hears us out when we need to talk; a group we go to in our struggle against addictions; a park or beach where we find peace and a chance to think things through. Recall how certain places and people bring us back to our center, back to balance--- they bring us healing. They are the means God uses to reach out to us and bring us healing from leprosy, the unacceptable parts of ourselves that cuts us off from others.

Notice God's is doing a great work for a foreigner. How sad that we are closing down to foreigners here in our own country, those from other lands, or those we consider "different" or "leprous." You might recall the Pope's visit a while back, and his call to us as a country to respond to the foreigners who flee to our shores as well as those we can assist in foreign lands.

There are possibilities in the reading for a preaching on our Christian "washing". Baptism is the source of new birth because it cleanses us of whatever "leprosy" we have due to sin; sin we have committed or the sin that has infected us from our surrounding world. Naaman was told to wash and as a result, he received the "flesh of a little child." Another possible allusion to what happens to us through our baptism, we become a new creation, a child of God. Naaman wants to do something more significant than going to the puny Jordan to bathe (the previous section tells this tale). However, the cleansing will not come from any great deed he does or from any great river to which he goes. It will come from God and it happens as God wishes. The emphasis is on the gift that this healing is and on the sovereignty of God and God's choice of Israel for salvation to all.

The Gospel healing occurred "on the way." It's a symbol for our life, we are "on the way." In our ordinary experience with God, we don't receive healing all at once. It is a process. We are "on the way", our faith assures us that we are being healed. Notice that all the lepers are "cured", but not all are "healed". We pray to be healed of afflictions or situations and we don't seem to immediately get what we ask.. But in the process of our lives, "on the way", we may be receiving a healing. Or have you ever known someone who prayed to be cured from an ailment and yet the ailment did not go away? Instead, the person was "healed", something touched that one's soul at a deep level and they became like new people, even in their sickness. We are being given faith, it is the source of our being made "whole", and it makes us children of God. This faith "saves" us from whatever situation with which we are struggling: it saves us from despair, feeling abandoned by God, alienation, unrelieved guilt, etc. Such faith makes true "cleansing" possible. Jesus affirms such faith for the leper and for us today when he says, "Stand up and go your way; your faith has been your salvation."

In the original language, the word for "realizing" ("...he had been cured"), is actually, "seeing" ("...he had been cured"). He saw what the others didn't see, not only that he was cured, but that Jesus was the source of the cure. The other lepers

were Jews and their cleansing meant they could go back and be accepted into the community. But this was a Samaritan and even "cured" he would not be accepted. He returns to Jesus, and praises the God of the cure. He is fully healed for he becomes part of a new community, the community of God's children who have been forgiven because of their faith in Jesus. Like the leper, we see Jesus as the reason for our cleansing from all that would separate us from God. In this new community where we are cleansed, all are accepted, regardless of race, class, religious correctness, etc.

At least that should be the case. All should not only be accepted, but welcomed into our community. The preacher, drawing from Jesus' healing of an outsider, can be the conscience of those gathered for worship today. Are all newcomers truly welcome? What kind of outreach does the parish have and to whom is that outreach directed? Would an obvious outsider, different from us because of dress, color of skin, accent, age, sexual orientation, etc., truly feel welcome at our socials after Sunday worship? As members of our parish councils? Are the aged and infirmed still highly esteemed, though they seem to give less to the community? Do we notice when they are absent? Do they count among us?

The Eucharist images today's Gospel story, for it is the return of the healed to give praise to God for what has been done for us "on the way". Here, in this worship place, we also express hope that "on the way" we will continue to receive healing and become more like children of God. Jesus' gift to the leper was the command, "Stand up and go your way." We are enabled at this Eucharist to stand up and continue on the way. ("The Way" was also a term used among the early Christians to describe the way of Jesus. Those on "the Way" were Christians, thus to go or continue on the way can be seen as an encouragement to live the way of Christ.) The process of healing will continue to be with us and we will discover it in many ways in our daily lives. We will experience that God has welcomed us home by forgiving our sins and welcoming us to this table. We will not let the differences among us divide the community, but we will see these differences as blessings and gifts for all of us. And we will make sure that in our society no group is treated as less, if they are, we will join our voices with theirs in protest.

ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER:

Achtemeier, Paul J., et al., eds. "Harper's Bible Dictionary". San Francisco:

Harper and Row, 1985.

This is a very good source for background information in your biblical work with a passage. Here is where you will find archeological, cultural, religious, economical, environmental, etc. material to help fill in your knowledge of the text and its details. And so, for example, I looked up material on leprosy in the time of Jesus. The quote below will give you a sense of this excellent dictionary and will show how it helps illuminate both today's first and third readings .

QUOTABLE:

“Leprosy, in the OT a disorder affecting humans, fabrics and houses. There are different types of leprosy that afflict persons (Lev. 13)...Persons or objects afflicted with leprosy can pollute others. Anyone who enters a leprous house must bathe. If a person tarries there by eating or lying down, both bathing and laundering are necessary....

A leper is to be excluded from habitations.... When the person recovers from the affliction, purification rites are performed (Lev. 14: 2-20). Similar rites are performed for a renovated house (14: 48-53)... These purification rites are not for the removal of leprosy, but only for the removal of residual ritual impurity (see Mark 1: 44). A rite for the curing of leprosy is found in the case of Naaman immersing in the Jordan seven times (2 Kings 5: 10, 14).”

----“Harper’s Bible Dictionary”

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: “FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR C” This compilation, from past “First Impressions,” includes two reflections on almost all Sundays and major feasts for this liturgical year. For more information and to purchase go to: <http://judeop.ispraleigh.com/>

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use “First Impressions” in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)

3. Our webpage address: <http://judeop.ispraleigh.com/>
(Where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes “First Impressions” and “Homilias Dominicales,” as well as articles, book reviews and quotes

pertinent to preaching.)

4. "Homilias Dominicales"-- these Spanish reflections are written by three friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Leobardo Almazan, OP, Wilmo Candanedo, OP and two Dominican sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP and Doris Regan, OP. Like "First Impressions", "Homilias Dominicales" are a preacher's early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive "Homilias Dominicales" drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: Jboll@opsouth.org or jboll@preacherexchange.org

5. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below. Make checks to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://judeop.ispraleigh.com>

Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

Jude Siciliano, O.P., Promoter of Preaching, Southern Dominican Province, USA
P.O. Box 12927, Raleigh, N.C. 27605, (919) 833-1893, Email: judeop@juno.com