

"FIRST IMPRESSIONS"

28th SUNDAY -C-

OCTOBER 12, 2025

2 Kings 5: 14-17; Psalm 98;

2 Timothy 2: 8-13; Luke 17:11-19

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Dear Preachers:

In our first reading today, we step into the narrative from the Second Book of Kings. But who is this Naaman, and why is he plunging seven times into the Jordan River? What is happening here, and how does it connect to our Gospel reading? (The first reading on Sunday is usually chosen from the Hebrew Scriptures because of its connection to the day's Gospel.)

Naaman was the Syrian commander of the king of Aram, a frequent enemy of Israel. He had contracted leprosy and, through his Israelite wife, learned that the prophet Elisha might cure him. Naaman traveled to Elisha, the successor of Elijah, who instructed him simply to bathe in the Jordan seven times. Naaman had expected something more dramatic—rituals, sacrifices, or at least a grand gesture. Instead, he was told to wash in what he considered an unimpressive river.

When Naaman was healed, he offered Elisha a gift, which the prophet refused. Naaman then asked to take home two loads of Israel's soil, believing that a god's power was tied to its land. By taking earth with him, he hoped to bring home the power of Israel's God—the one who had healed him. Here a foreigner is cured by Israel's God, a clear sign that divine blessing is not confined to one people, but is meant for all. Our Gospel echoes this same truth: Jesus heals a leper who was a Samaritan, a foreigner and enemy in the eyes of Israel.

As a child in parochial school, one of our heroes was St. Damien of Molokai, long admired for his work among people with leprosy in Hawaii. When he began one of his homilies to his congregation of lepers with the words, "We lepers..." he revealed that he too had contracted their disease.

In the United States, there was once a leprosarium in Carville, Louisiana, founded in 1894 on the site of an abandoned sugar plantation. It eventually became a hospital for the study and treatment of Hansen's disease (the modern name for leprosy). In its early days, however, there was no cure, and those admitted entered under mandatory quarantine—many never leaving again. Fear of leprosy was intense, given its disfiguring effects on the body.

Imagine, then, the powerful witness of Damien on Molokai. His presence was a sign of friendship and of Christ's living presence among the suffering. In a real sense, Damien embodied what Jesus himself did in today's Gospel, when ten lepers approached him on the road to Jerusalem.

Leprosy may no longer be a daily fear for us, but many still experience isolation. A friend once told me that after her husband's death, leaving her with three children, she asked herself, "What did I do that God would punish me so?" At church she sat in the back, numb, feeling cut off from families around her. "They were not like me—I felt like a leper," she said. What deepened her pain was this: "I never heard my situation spoken about in homilies." She felt physically, emotionally, and spiritually excluded—a kind of "spiritual leprosy."

Others describe similar feelings. One woman, active in her parish and a lector at Mass, said after her husband left her: "As a divorced person in the Church, I felt like a leper."

The band of lepers in the Gospel lived such isolation daily. They were seen as untouchables—feared even by their own families. They formed what might be called a "community of the isolated." Their shared suffering broke down barriers between Jew and Samaritan; enemies found solidarity in grief, pain, and

loneliness. To make matters worse, people believed their illness was punishment for sin, leaving them burdened with guilt for a sin they could not even name.

As someone has said: "No matter our differences, when we hurt, we all shed the same tears." Pain can unite us across divisions. We see it today when hunger, bombings, and death bring people together in places like Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan.

In the Gospel, the lepers cry out together, united in their need: "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" Jesus responds with a command: "Go show yourselves to the priests." Their healing unfolds as they journey. Most likely, they believed God had healed them, and so they obeyed by heading toward the Temple. But one man—the least expected, a Samaritan—realized what had happened. He recognized Jesus himself as the source of his healing. He returned, fell at Jesus' feet, and gave thanks.

Many of us, too, seek healing—whether from illness, grief, sin, or the inability to forgive. Sometimes God's grace is dramatic and unmistakable, but more often it comes quietly, gradually, as we travel through life. Like the lepers, we voice our needs along the way: forgiveness, patience, compassion, the strength to love those we find hardest to love. The healing usually happens, not in an instant, but "on the road."

Like the Samaritan, we sometimes come to realize that change has taken place—greater strength, patience, generosity, renewal. And we know this has not come from us alone. Jesus' words ring true: "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."

There is still more to come, more healing yet to be done in us. But here and now, at this altar, we pause to give thanks. At the start of every Eucharist we echo the lepers' plea: "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" And here we realize that he has extended mercy to us again—as he does each time we ask.

We are being healed on the road. We travel together as a pilgrim people, and we return here, week after week, to the source of our healing and nourishment: the Eucharist.

Click here for a link to this Sunday's readings:
<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/101225.cfm>