

The 28th Sunday of Ordinary Time — October 13, 2019

Once again, a great selection of readings on the surface, as often happens, it can appear to be stories about people with leprosy, and how healing came in both circumstances. But, we know it was much deeper than that. What we hear and see on the surface, is usually just an introduction to the teaching which Jesus wants us to hear.

So what do you see as the common, deeper teaching in both of these Stories ? In the 1st Reading, we have the story of Naaman the Syrian. He was a great General in the Syrian Army, and he contracted the dreaded disease of the day leprosy. He heard from his wife's servant girl that there was a prophet in Israel who could cure his leprosy. Interesting indeed, but why should he, a great general, have to go to Israel for healing? After all, Israel was the "enemy" !

But reluctantly, at the persuasion of his friends, he goes. More humiliating experiences follow. He locates the prophet Elisha, and he is indignant that the prophet won't even come out to meet himafter all he is a powerful General ! The prophet sends a message through his attendant that Naaman should go down to the Jordan and plunge seven times into the waters. Now he is really indignant saying what is so special about the Jordan? Are not the Syrian waters better? His entourage gently persuade him to follow the orders at least it won't do any harm and it might do some real good. So, we pick up the story with Naaman plunging seven times into the Jordan River and voila — "His flesh became again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean of his leprosy."

Naaman has a powerful conversion experience, he returns to the prophet proclaiming : "Now I know that there is no God in all the Earth, except in Israel." He offers a gift to the prophet, which the prophet duly refuses saying I am merely serving the Lord. What I have received from the Lord I am giving freely.

Now we are seeing the larger teaching.

The Gospel brings the whole picture into a clearer perspective. The Story of the Cleansing of the Ten Lepers is found in Saint Luke's Gospel, alone. Leprosy was a prevalent disease in those days, and there were some very stringent laws in place to prevent the spread of the disease, and to restrict the movements of those who had the disease. Those afflicted with the disease were required to announce their presence whenever they came into the public domain. They were to ring a bell and call out Leper's Leper's and public would scatter immediately. It had to have been a most humiliating experience.

So how did they come to hear about Jesus ? How did they possibly come to a belief that Jesus could heal them ? Could it have been through the Samaritan ?

Wow, wouldn't that have been a surprise!? Remember, Jews and Samaritans despised each other ... They were "Enemies." Who knows how they came to believe in Him ? It could have been a last ditch effort ! Nonetheless, they came to Him ! Jesus' response "Go show yourselves to the Priests" was an interesting response not unlike Elisha's response to Naaman. But, what was really happening is that Jesus was following the Laws of the day, and so were the 10. The priests, or Sanhedrin, were the authority of the day for certifying healings. If someone claimed a healing. it had to be certified by the priests in order for the person to re-enter community. The interesting detail is one returns to give Thanks..... He was a Samaritan and as we know Samaritans despised Jews, and vice-versa !

So what is the core teaching in all of this ?

Our current study is such a great insight into this Gospel, and indeed the 1st Reading as well. The chapter we covered last week "Love Your Enemies," and the Chapter for this week "Cultivate a Generous Spirit," are powerful insights into these stories. In both instances we have the perceived 'Enemy,' and in both instances that 'perceived' enemy holds the key to healing. This certainly invites us to go much more deeply into the reality of why Jesus invites us "To love our Enemy."

Loving our enemy may indeed be the key solution to many of our problems, or issues. It is important for us to get a correct stance on why Jesus is inviting us to 'Love Our Enemy' It is not for my enemies sake, it is for my own sake ! What Jesus is telling us is that it diminishes us when we withhold loveit disfigures us emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. It causes us to become small in our rationing of love, rather than expansive, as His love is and He is inviting us to be more like Him. When we cradle and nurture our hurt and our fear, choosing to hold a grudge and not forgive, we take ourselves out of the stream of forgiveness which He is providing us. When we do this it becomes really difficult for us to 'Cultivate a Generous Spirit'.

Linda Rooney speaks of the beneficiaries of this Generous Spirit. we benefit ourselveswe benefit the other person God is a beneficiary....because we are becoming more like Him, and more like our true selves. And finally, the Church benefits because it becomes a reminder within our community that we are practicing what we preach.

Linda Rooney encourages the development of "Small faith Communities" where people intentionally "support and challenge one another to greater discipleship" and as a result of sharing faith and hope with one another all grow. My friends, we are doing it! That is precisely why we did ChristLife, in the hope that we would have people intentionally join Small Faith Groups and really grow in their Faith and personal Relationship with Him. and it is producing some powerful results !

— Fr. Gerry Hurley