

## HOMILY SUNDAY 28-C

### “Obedient Faith and Grateful Praise”

(2 Kings 5:14-17; Psalm 98; 2 Timothy 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19)

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Have you ever had a second chance? What difference did that make in your life?

Follow Jesus more closely through obedient faith and grateful praise.

In November of 2005, my brother Louis suddenly went into a coma while visiting in Toronto and was operated on for an aggressive cancerous brain tumour. He was given a 50-50% chance of making it through the operation. When he did, two doctors told my sister-in-law Judy that with this aggressive cancer, he had only from 8 months to a year and a half to live.

To say the least, the past two years have been a marathon of good medical attention, treatment for the cancer, and countless prayers by many family members, relatives, friends and even strangers. After two years of remission, the tumour returned and we feared the worst. Miraculously, with more prayer and a change in treatment, the tumour started to shrink and at the moment of this writing, Louis is continuing to recover and happily helping with the harvest.

I once read somewhere that one out of ten persons who are given a second chance like Louis, are dramatically changed by that experience and live a qualitatively different kind of life. The other nine may manifest some change initially, but slowly drift back to their old way of life. Louis is one out of ten – the life that he and Judy now live is marked by more quality family time and grateful praise. Every time I call Louis and we talk about his situation, he constantly says two things: “Thank you Jesus” and “Thank you Sylvain for the prayers.” He is to me an example of a true disciple of Jesus, one who lives a life of obedient faith and grateful praise.

Another such person is Namaan the leper in the first reading today. He was a pagan who believed in many gods and in desperation, grasping at straws, obeyed the words of an Israelite slave girl to turn to the prophet Elisha. When advised to bathe in the Jordan seven times, he balked out of pride in his own rivers back home, but finally relented, obeyed the Word of Elisha, a man of God, humbly immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, and was healed. His healing was marked by the same two things as my brother: obedient faith in the God of Israel, and grateful praise. He came back gratefully offering gifts, and took home a load of earth from Israel upon which to offer praise only to the Lord.

The psalm response applies to Namaan, to whom the Lord has revealed his healing power. That psalm, written a millennium before Jesus, initially referred to physical healing and political liberation of the chosen people from slavery in Egypt. For the Christian, however, the psalm takes on a whole new and much deeper meaning. In Jesus, God has liberated us from the power of evil in our lives. In Jesus, God has forgiven our sins and healed us of our sinfulness - that which makes us sin. We have been truly liberated and set free.

It is this deeper freedom that Paul is so enthusiastic about in the second reading. “Remember Jesus

Christ,” he proclaims, “a descendant of David, risen from the dead,” whose gospel he is now willing to suffer for so that we might obtain the “salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” Paul is speaking from his own experience. A devout Pharisee steeped in the religion of his time, he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and that changed his life forever. He was healed of his religious blindness, and spent the rest of his life, even sacrificed his life, tirelessly spreading this Good News that we can so easily take for granted today. His was unequivocally a life of obedient faith and grateful praise.

The gospel builds on the first reading and takes us to a beautiful and stirring climax. There are now ten lepers, not just one. There is not only the prophet Elisha, a man of God - there is Jesus himself, on the way to Jerusalem where he will reveal the love of God for us on the cross and accomplish the salvation of all humanity through his death and resurrection. There is no Jordan River - there is only the Word of Jesus, his command to the lepers to go and show themselves to the priests. And on the way they are healed.

Above all, there is the one leper, a despised Samaritan, who returns to give thanks to Jesus. He is healed not only physically, but like St. Paul moves on to a whole new way of life marked by faith in Jesus and grateful praise. The other nine were so focused on getting their old life back and caught in the rigid structures of that old life, that they missed out on this deeper healing that our loving God, in Jesus, wants to share with all humanity.

The point of the story is not the healing, but the response of those who were touched by God’s mercy. The last leper recognizes that God has acted through Jesus, and he offers praise to God. The proper response to God’s mercy is not presumption that this is what we deserved, but untainted gratitude and pure praise of God for God’s saving mercy.

According to the New Interpreters Bible, the leper did not just celebrate his good fortune, but returned to praise God and worship Jesus. Gratitude may be the purest measure of one’s character and spiritual condition. The absence of gratitude reveals selfishness and self-centred presumption of deserving what we get. The grateful person reveals a humility of spirit and a sensitivity to love expressed by others. The grateful person, therefore, regards others’ acts of kindness and experiences of God’s grace with profound gratitude. Life itself is a gift. Health is a precious gift, as is the friendship of others. We are also challenged to see gratitude as an expression of faith. There is no better measure of faith than wonder and gratitude for unmerited expressions of love and kindness from God and others. For those who become aware of God’s grace, all of life is infused with a sense of gratitude, and each encounter becomes an opportunity to see and to respond in the spirit of the grateful leper.

The following excerpts from my sister-in-law’s journal exemplify that attitude of obedient faith and grateful praise. “Your calls, visits, e-mails and support are wonderful. We are like trees sheltered and protected from the storms within a forest rather than vulnerable to the storms if we stood alone open to the winds. We have enjoyed time and broken bread with our extended family and friends. So many people makeup the fabric of our lives. We are grateful for the fellowship and friendships that have so enriched our lives. We realize the blessing of a small community and cherish the continued ties to those who have ventured away. We know time and distance are no barriers to love. I am grateful for the compassion and understanding of my employers and co-workers. I find it a solace to

listen to Christian and inspirational music, to pray and read. I hope that all of you will learn that we can take nothing for granted and realize the gift of each day and that good health is so amazing, to not put off doing or sharing or saying anything. Do not procrastinate living to the full. I could scream when I hear the expression 'We'll do that when we retire.' So my friends, go embrace the spring breezes, the smell of the fresh earth, the songs of birds and wonder as the world experiences rebirth. Go seize the day"

John O'Shea, in his comments on this gospel, has some striking and beautiful insights. For him, this is a story about seizing or not seizing second chances. "Being cured on the way" is a literary device that forces the ten to choose. What is more important – organizational approval or praise of God and gratitude to Jesus? What is more important – re-entry into the established Jewish community or entry into the company of those who acknowledged God's action in Jesus? What is more important – getting back to life as it was or getting a whole new life?

The second chance unfolds in the second decision. Faith is the Samaritan's capacity to see the deeper causes of his cure and to acknowledge those causes in praise and thanksgiving. When the Samaritan falls at the feet of Jesus, it is more than a profound moment of worship. It symbolizes his commitment to the teachings of Jesus and his desire to follow the way of life Jesus advocates. The second chance entails praising God, thanking Jesus and following his way of life. These three aspects are intertwined and together they constitute a transformation of consciousness. We have already lived in the shadow of death and we can sense how resurrection is a larger version of the second chance we are now learning how to seize.

In this moment, before we finish reading this sentence, we can praise God for the life we do not own, thank Jesus for the revelation of divine mercy that calls us out of isolation, and become more serious about allowing his way of life to have influence on our own. The second chance slumbers in every minute. Will we seize it?

Gustavo Gutierrez of Liberation Theology fame, who spoke in Edmonton some years ago, understood this dynamic of faith well. He mentioned that if any in his audience felt driven to go to Latin America because they were angry at the injustice experienced there, they should stay home because there are already enough angry people in Latin America and they would not be of any help. If they wanted to go because they felt guilty for all they had in the north and there was so much poverty in Latin America, they should not go – there were already enough guilty people there. But if they wanted to come because they were grateful for all that they had received from God, then they should come, they could help, because more grateful people were always needed.

The Eucharist that we now celebrate is an expression of faith in the love of God made present in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. We are invited to make of it an expression of joyful praise and worship in obedience to the Word of God

So pray for obedient faith in Jesus, and express that faith through joyful, grateful praise and worship.