

**Homily for October 10, 2004  
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**2 Kings 5:14-17**

**Psalm 98:1-4**

**2 Timothy 2:8-13**

**Luke 17:11-19**

## *Faith calls us to undertake a journey fraught with risks.*

Today's readings weave timeless tales of those who dared to embark on journeys seeking wholeness and freedom: wholeness of body, mind and spirit; freedom from hunger, imprisonment and social ostracism.

The experience of pain is a common denominator that motivates people in these stories: Naaman travels from Syria to seek a cure for his ailment in the Second Book of Kings, chapter five. On the other hand, as pain is the catalyst for people to move out and actively seek, so too pain can immobilize, as in Luke, chapter 17. The 10 lepers in the village Jesus entered were social outcasts. The nature of their disease prevented them from embarking on a journey. Society may have circumscribed their physical movement, but it could not prevent them from lifting their voices and crying out to Jesus for mercy. Jesus' response was, "Go!" Move, undertake the journey, show yourselves to the priests. In the process of setting forth, they were healed.

Jesus called people beyond their fears, doubts and anger. He helped them find the courage to risk the first step of the journey. And what of us? What longings do we feel when we read of Naaman and the 10 lepers?

Haven't we longed for the purity and innocence symbolized by Naaman's flesh made clean and restored like the flesh of a little child? Haven't we stood at a distance and cried out for recognition, for healing and wholeness?

Healing comes, paradoxically, when we stop denying our pain and our longing. Jesus, the great diviner of the human heart, clearly saw these threads of pain and longing in the people he encountered. He helped them to acknowledge both, not sugarcoating the pain or downplaying the longing. He responded immediately when confronted with the plea of the lepers for mercy, made poignant by the union of their pain and longing. Jesus helped them find the courage to show themselves to the priests, to dare to enter once again the society that had expelled them.

There they were, standing the prescribed distance from him. Misery had brought them together, nine Jews and one Samaritan. They were not allowed to approach him. From a distance, they shouted: "Heal us, please, heal us!" Jesus kept to the rules that time, and he said: "Go to the priests and show yourselves." They turned around and went, and on their way, they were healed.

One of them came back. He fell on his knees before Jesus and thanked him at the top of his voice.

That is why everybody almost always tells us that this gospel episode teaches us that we should be thankful. Definitely, thankfulness is a very great virtue. It shows what a person is worth.

Yet, is this story really about thankfulness? I think it is more about faith.

They were 10. One, a Samaritan, is called a stranger by Jesus. When they asked him for his help, he sent them to the priests in Jerusalem, to the temple's skin-disease checkpoint.

They went, and they were headed on their way. It was only then that the Samaritan remembered he could not go to those priests. He would have been most unwelcome. He certainly would have been kicked out. That is why he left those others and turned the only way he really could go. He came to Jesus to thank him, but that is not all that happened. Jesus asked him: "Where are the others?" Of course, he knew where they were.

Let's imagine one had been a shopkeeper before his sickness hit him, and after having obtained his healing and his healing certificate, he was back in his shop, doing the accounts. Another had been a farmer, and the next day he was milking his cows. Another had been a lecturer at the university, and he, too, returned directly to his job.

They had all been touched by Jesus. Their skin, the surface of their bodies, had been healed. For the rest, however, it had all remained the same. But the Samaritan came back, and Jesus said, "Your faith has saved you." Not his skin, but him; not the surface, but his heart; not his epidermis, but his mind. He really

followed Jesus. Number 10 came back. He did not return to his old life and his old world. He lived a new life with him.

Jesus, too, touches us. If we had not been touched, we would not be here. How deep did it go? Are we like the nine or like number 10?

Of the 10, though, only the one who returned to give thanks was healed within. He was the only one to realize that not only had his pain ceased, but the longing of his heart and soul had been fulfilled. Let's face it...it's faith that brings us here today and to this table of food and drink that we believe nourishes us for life everlasting, healing deeper than skin and bones. For this we give praise to the Father.

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