

The healing of the prophet Naaman in today's first reading is a dramatic manifestation of the Lord's power to heal. In order to fully appreciate it, it is important to situate the kinds of healings spoken of both in the Book of Kings and later in today's Gospel in context. In a verse immediately prior to the start of the reading, we are told that Naaman had hoped the Lord would move his hand over the infected place and thus cure his leprous spot. It is possible that the disease was still in its early phase. In the mindset of the time, sickness and death, sorrow and sadness were all the consequences of sin.<sup>1</sup> Death entered the world through sin.<sup>2</sup>

Leprosy was an infectious disease, a frightening one, devastating to all who might come into contact with a loved one who had contracted it. There is not other way to describe it other than to say that the lepers were the "walking dead," the forgotten ones, the shunned. Aaron spoke about his sister Miriam, stricken with a scaly infection "as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed."<sup>3</sup>

The entire 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Leviticus reads like a medical manual, replete with precise rules for dealing with various diseases of the skin and how the levitical priest is to conduct an examination, ultimately for the purpose of deciding whether the blotched person ought to be quarantined. He must look to determine color, whether the disease is itchy, whether the infection appears upon the garment, and if so to burn the garment.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Gen. 3:16ff.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Rom. 5:12

<sup>3</sup> cf. Num. 12:12

Verse 46 reads, “As long as the infection is present, the person shall be unclean. Being unclean, that individual shall dwell apart, taking up residence outside the camp.” While this was done for the protection of the people, it must have been devastating to the individuals, for their separation was permanent and irrevocable. It was that marginalization that had to be the worst part of the disease- to be completely cut off. Naaman’s cleansing is not just the end of his disease – it is the beginning of his relationship with God. It is what he does with his new life that matters: He pledges to honor the God of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

Today’s Gospel also speaks of leprosy, but there is a noticeable development from the first reading from the Book of Kings. Most miracle accounts in the New Testament speak of the individual being healed. But here, a different word is used. The ten lepers were **cleansed** from their leprosy. Jesus brought physical healing to these lepers to be sure. But even more, he brought them spiritual integrity as well, enabling them to resume worship of God.

Only one leper returns- a foreigner and a Samaritan- to give thanks. All ten could return to the community because they were cured. Nine were additionally cleansed. That is more than physical healing- this refers to ritual cleansing, allowing them to worship. The priests could not declare the Samaritan ritually pure because he was not of the Jewish faith. Jesus had something even better in store for this man. The Samaritan’s return to Jesus goes a step farther.

While the others are cleansed, the Samaritan enters into a conversation with Jesus, and it is just the two of them. Here Jesus tells him, not that he was cleansed, but that he is saved. The Samaritan was able to see in Jesus something that exceeded even the Mosaic Law.

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<sup>4</sup> “What Baptism Does for Us,” National Catholic Register, 1 October 2013

Step one is Healing- this refers only to the physical level, and in itself is amazing to be sure. But it does not stop there, for Step Two is cleansing. To be cleansed means something much more profound. It connotes being full, integral and made whole with ourselves before the Lord. Consider how good it feels after an afternoon's work in the yard, or following a workout, when we cleanse ourselves and put on a fresh set of clothes. Or even more, consider how we feel spiritually cleansed following confession, when a tremendous weight has been lifted? We feel God's grace pouring over us to cleanse us.

Notice that the Samaritan was not told, "Go show your self to the priest." That is because that step was not necessary. He had found Jesus- he had found his Savior. The gift of salvation offered to the Samaritan in the Gospel raises this to a whole new level. "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you."

In these most difficult days, today's Gospel provides a valuable insight into the power of healing and the transformative potential of God's cleansing love. As we know from our own personal experience, sometimes prior to healing, we must acknowledge our own brokenness, we must dress and even cauterize our wounds.

We are powerfully reminded to remain focused upon Jesus, we see our need to long for Him above all and before all. Let us pray for healing, cleansing and most importantly, for salvation.