

28th Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C” *Knowing the True God.*
2 Kings 5:14-17; 2 Tim. 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19
October 8-9, 2016

In today’s first reading, we have an excellent lesson in the ways in which God seeks to work in our lives, and we get a glimpse, so to speak, of how God operates. Naaman, a pagan army commander, was struck with leprosy. Elisha intercedes to cure him. The obvious question here is “Why would he bother to cure a pagan man who knew nothing of the God of Israel?”

After all, weren’t the Jews the chosen people? When Naaman comes back to thank the prophet, the prophet refuses to accept a gift for his services, but the soldier begs so that at least he can take some of the soil of Israel back home. Perhaps he was superstitious enough to think that the Jewish God could only be present on Jewish soil.

We have here the story of a foreign man who adores false gods, comes from a pagan land with its superstitions, yet he is not only cured by the prophet, but he eventually converts. The lesson is vital for us today. God was and is the God of all peoples in the world. If he chose a certain people from among the nations of the world it does not mean that he had no interest in the others.

As Catholics we are in a similar position. We have been given so much, that more is expected of us. In this day and age it strikes some as arrogant to say that Catholicism can make any truth claims, or mere Christianity for that matter. Vatican II sees it quite differently. “This one Church of Christ, which we confess in the Creed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic [...]. This Church, constituted and organized in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him”.¹

¹ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 8.2

In paragraph 8 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* ‘subsistence’ refers to a perduring, historical continuity and the permanence of all the elements instituted by Christ in the Catholic Church, in which the Church of Christ is concretely found on this earth.²

At the same time, the Church correctly recognizes in non-Christian religions that search for God who is unknown yet near, and she considers all goodness and truth found in these religions as a “preparation for the Gospel” given by God himself. Following the lead of the Old Testament passage, God indeed desires the salvation of all and He is the God of all peoples on the earth.³

This does not mean, however, that all religions are equal. C. S. Lewis, author of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* wrote: “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

Pope Benedict XVI spoke in his final homily as Cardinal Ratzinger, prior to the start of the conclave when he said: “We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.”⁴

We saw what happened in our Gospel as a result of a lack of gratitude for the gift of healing. It cannot be this way for us. If we are not truly grateful for our faith, a later generation will stop caring. We see this in poll after poll in which people are becoming more and more relativistic, making it difficult to speak of any moral absolutes whatsoever.

² cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 24 June 1973, *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, 1.1, Dominus Iesus, 16.3, CDF

³ cf. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* 16, *Nostra Aetate* 2)

⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, homily of 18 April 2005 @ St. Peter’s Basilica

Yahweh reached out to the pagan through the prophet Elisha to help bring him to the liberating truth. At the appointed time He moved the Jewish people to the fullness of revelation through Jesus Christ.

When the Holy Father visited England in 2010, he picked up this familiar theme begun on the eve of his own election as Pope:

“There are some who now seek to exclude religious belief from public discourse, to privatize it or even to paint it as a threat to equality and liberty,” the pope said. “Yet religion is in fact a guarantee of authentic liberty and respect, leading us to look upon every person as a brother or sister.”⁵

But we do not have time to be discouraged or downtrodden. We may just be beginning to see how tough is our faith, how strong our convictions. We desperately need courage and conviction, tempered with charity and respect, but above all fidelity to Christ and His Church.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Journey to the United Kingdom, homily at Mass 16 September 2010, Glasgow, Scotland.