

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Mon, 07/08/2013 - 20:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

2 Kings 5:14-17

Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

2 Timothy 2:8-13

Luke 17:11-19

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word in Liturgy

Written around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylonian invaders in 587 B.C., the books of Kings were composed to instruct and encourage the survivors of this terrible catastrophe. One of the three major themes of these books, exemplified in today's passage, is that the Word of God through prophets guides and directs the people. Today's passage tells of a foreigner who, having received a miraculous healing through the prophet Elisha, gives thanks to the prophet and acclaims the God of Israel. Naaman the Syrian, a military commander whose very presence caused alarm to Israel's king, Jehoram, because of the rather uncertain peace enjoyed between Israel and Syria, nonetheless is impelled by his illness to seek out Elisha for healing. (Leprosy could refer to a variety of skin diseases—some curable, some not.)

We pick up the narrative after Naaman has bathed and been cured, and learn of his gratitude and his faith. Because of the belief that deities could not be worshipped except on their own soil, and his recognition that Yahweh, though God of all, has a particular relationship to Israel, Naaman asks for two mule-loads of earth to bring home on which to build his own altar for offering sacrifices to the God of Israel.

Today's account of the ten lepers is unique to Luke's Gospel. Leprosy—a blanket term for a variety of skin diseases—caused its sufferers to be separated from society and was associated with moral guilt as well. Here, as is usual in Luke's Gospel, the performance of healing is a sign of God's kingdom. Luke frequently cites the openness of foreigners to the person and message of Jesus, as in this story where the sole leper to return and give thanks is a Samaritan. The Samaritan prostrates himself before Jesus—a gesture of recognition of overwhelming greatness and of adoration. His response of gratitude is the response of faith. He is "saved," not merely "cured." Jesus contrasts his reaction to those who did not return. Once again, ironically (as in 10:33), a Samaritan provides the example to follow.

In many respects the story is parallel to the account of Naaman the Syrian. The disease of leprosy is the same. A miraculous healing takes place in both cases. Gratitude is expressed. And the one who is healed is an outsider to the people of Israel. The stories attest to the universal scope of God's will to save and the presence of the gift of faith in unlikely people. They are likewise an eloquent witness to the appropriateness and necessity of giving thanks to God, which may be the subject of today's catechesis.

Catholic Doctrine

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Our Catholic tradition names five basic types of prayer: the prayer of blessing and adoration, the prayer of petition, the prayer of intercession, the prayer of thanksgiving and the prayer of praise. Any particular moment of prayer between an individual or group and God may very well move between these various types. For the sake of understanding, however, Catholic teaching clarifies these different types of prayer. The Scriptures for this Sunday (Naaman's offer of a gift to God's prophet, the one leper who returned to give thanks to Jesus) vividly illustrate the prayer of thanksgiving.

All of life and creation is a gift from God. How much more is the gift given to us in Christ by which life and creation is redeemed and set free from sin and its wages. The whole stance of the Church, therefore, is one of thanksgiving for God's saving action in Jesus.

Eucharist, the very word we use to denote the table fellowship and the saving sacrifice of Jesus made present in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the one cup, is derived from the Greek for "thanksgiving." The character of the Eucharistic banquet is a profound thanksgiving for the Church's experience of the gift of salvation in Christ (CCC 2637).

But the thanksgiving we render to God need not take place only when Eucharist is celebrated. Every moment and every need is potentially a springboard for thanking God (CCC 2638).

God's relationship to us is characterized over and over again by gift giving. The greatest gift is the life, ministry, suffering, and death of Jesus. There are many threads of continuity between our ancestors in faith and us, but one of the strongest and deepest is our common prayer of thanksgiving for the graciousness of God.

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