

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Br. Samuel Springuel

13 October, 2019

1st Reading 2 Kings 5:14–17

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 98:1,2–3,3–4

2nd Reading 2 Timothy 2:8–13

Gospel Luke 17:11–19

If you were given the power to heal, who would you use it on? Who would be at the top of the list? Family, friends? Certainly these would probably top the list. We quite naturally want what is best for those we love and given the power to do so, we would remove any sickness, disease, or injury that might be harming them.

Who else? Once those we loved were taken care of we'd probably start thinking about those around us: our neighbors, co-workers, the people we see on the bus, in the coffee shop, or when otherwise engaged with our normal routine. We may not love these people, but we do know them to a greater or lesser extent. They are part of our lives and in most cases add something to it. That something may be large or it may be small, but the regular interaction, the familiarity, means that their lives and concerns touch us when we hear about them and given the power, we'd probably step up to help them out.

And after that? Who is in the next ring out? If you had the power to heal would you use it on the poor and homeless here in DC? Would you go further afield and help out the medically underserved in other cities and states? Would you travel internationally and help out in other countries where medical care isn't as available as it is here in the United States? Would you put yourself at risk and help those in refugee camps and war zones? Given the power to heal, how far would you go?

While we might like to claim, in some idealistic fashion, that given such a power we would go as far and help as many as we could, if we're being honest our limits are probably much closer to home than we would like to admit. Certainly these limits are to some extent informed by realism: there is only so much time and resources which we can dedicate to seeking out those who need our help. We have responsibilities to our own families and communities and have to make sure we are meeting them before going beyond them to help others. Furthermore, there is some amount of time and effort that we have to put into taking care of ourselves lest we burn out and become incapable of helping anyone. Chances are, however, that our limits are even closer than such realism would dictate.

If we really think about it, we can probably identify somebody whom we would not choose to heal. Someone, perhaps, who hurt us or someone we loved. Someone who is the antithesis of all we stand for. Someone who annoys, belittles, or insults us by the way they act or with what they say. Or maybe someone

with whom we fight, who seems to want to harm us. Such people would not be high on our list of people whom we would heal if given the power. Indeed, they might not make the list at all.

And yet those are the people who present themselves in today's readings. Naaman was a military commander for the Kingdom of Aram, Israel's rivals to the north. The two kingdoms were not on good terms and Naaman was an agent of this rivalry. Indeed, it is something of an irony that it is an Israelite girl, taken as a slave in a raid by the Aramean army (probably with Naaman at its head), who suggests seeking out Elisha to cure Naaman's leprosy. It would not be out of order to expect Elisha to turn Naaman away, or at least demand the freedom of the Israelites he had captured in return for his healing. And yet Elisha does neither of these things; he in fact refuses all payment and heals Naaman with no questions asked, no promises given.

In the Gospel, Jesus goes even further. Not one, but 10 lepers are cured. Again, no questions are asked; the men ask for pity and it is immediately and unreservedly granted to them. Even when 9 of the ten turn out to be ungrateful for what has been done for them, it is not taken back. Even when the one who is grateful turns out to be a Samaritan, of the same people who had at the beginning of his journey rejected Jesus and refused him hospitality simply because he was headed to Jerusalem, Jesus doesn't regret healing the man and even commends his faith. There is no regret, no reservation, no wishing that he could take back what he had done.

Enemies, rivals, the ungrateful, or even simply those who are different from us, these are the people to whom we are challenged to reach out by today's readings. Of course, we don't have the power to heal the way Elisha or Jesus did. Miracles are hard to come by in this day and age. But that does not mean we are powerless. Paul's letter to Timothy reminds us that sometimes all we need to do is bear with the injustices which others send our way. To give witness to our faith by perseverance in trials and thereby let the love of Jesus shine forth from us. This is a love which goes out to all and we are must endeavor to live by, through, and in that love no matter what, no matter who receives it.