Lectio Divina – 28th Sunday of the Year C

Contexts

Luke's Gospel (in brief)

See previous Lectio Notes

Luke 17:11-10 – things to notice

- Follows immediately on the parable story of last week.
- note: this is not a parable but a story.
- Begins with the reminder that Jesus is still on his way to Jerusalem.
- Introduces the 3rd set of instructions about the meaning of the Christian Way.
- Again, this story is proper to Luke.
- Note the location: along the border between Samaria and Galilee.
- Jesus is on the margins geographically and the lepers who come out to meet him are certainly on the margins of their family, social and religious lives.
- The lepers stand 'some way off' – a normal precaution against contagious diseases.
- They ask for help. Jesus sends them to the priests – a Jewish custom in which priests had to verify a cure or healing before a person could be readmitted to village and synagogue.
- On the way to the priests they are cured.
- One (a Samaritan), realising what has happened, turns back, praises God and throws himself at Jesus' feet and thanks him.
- 'The other nine, where are they?' – only the Samaritan sees what has been done for him – not just the cure of his disease but his realisation that God has acted for him through Jesus – an experience of salvation.
- Note that Jesus does NOT remark on the man praising him (Jesus), but on the man praising God.
- See the first reading: Naaman makes a similar journey, from wanting to thank Elisha for his cure to faith in God who has cured him through Elisha.
- As always, miracle stories are not about Jesus and his marvellous powers – they are about the teaching or the 'word' which arises form the story. It is the Samaritan, the outsider, who realises what God is doing in the ministry of Jesus. the other 9 (presumably Israelites) don't realise this.
- As always, healing stories are about more than just a cure of a disease or a deformity – they are about total restoration: to wholeness of self, to family, to village & social life to synagogue and religious life, to true faith in God.
- The Samaritans action of 'throwing himself at the feet of Jesus' is his conversion.
- Jesus tells him to stand up and go on his way and that his faith has saved him. It is a faith that sees beyond the surface of what has happened to him.
- The parable does not seem to be about the ingratitude of the other 9, but about the one person who fully realises the saving action of God present in the person of Jesus.
- It is also a reminder that Christian life is not for an exclusive few (perhaps the rich Pharisees in Luke's communities) but for all – even foreigners and the sick.
- In Jesus disciples find the fullness of human wholeness (NJBC).

The Liturgical Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on this Sunday?

One of the features of this second part of instructions is Jesus' use of parables. These parable stories (nearly all of them unique to Luke) have been chosen for the Sunday

Gospels leading up to the end of the Liturgical Year (on 34th Sunday, the Feast of Christ the King).

22 Sunday – parable about Jesus' Kingdom Banquet
23 Sunday – Parables about readiness & commitment
24 Sunday – Parables about The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, The Parable of the Lost Brothers
(Prodigal Son/Loving Father) – God will search for the lost ones
25 Sunday – Parable of the Dishonest Steward – the right use of riches & wealth
26 Sunday – Parable of the Rich Man & Lazarus – A reversal of fortunes, difficulty of conversion
27 Sunday – Parable of the Servant & the Master – Humble leadership as service
28 Sunday – The Ten Lepers – A story of real faith from an unexpected source
29 Sunday – Parable of the Unjust Judge – Persistence will win the day / God readily acts
30 Sunday – Parable of the Tax Collector & the Pharisee – Being at rights with God
31 Sunday – Zacchaeus – A story of conversion
32 Sunday – The resurrection debated – God of the living or the dead?
33 Sunday – Signs announcing the end – Living now in anticipation of the end
34 Sunday – The Repentant Thief – an assurance of mercy

Both the first reading (2 Kings 5:14-17) and the Gospel this weekend contain healing stories of 'outsiders' - non-Israelites. One of the themes of the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament) is the extension of God's favour to all peoples, not just the Israelites. The story of the cure of Naaman, a Syrian, paves the way for the reading of the Gospel story this weekend.

A major theme in St Luke's Gospel is that the message of Jesus is for all: men and women, rich and poor, old and young, healthy and sick, gentile and Jew. No one is excluded.

It is no accident that the one grateful leper in this week's Gospel is not a Jew but a Samaritan – an outsider, excluded by race, religion and his illness. He joins the others in asking a Jewish Rabbi for mercy.

In curing the ten lepers, Jesus gives them back to their families, their communities, their religious practice. No longer confined to isolated places for fear of spreading disease, they are free to take up their lives again. In short, as well as healing them physically, Jesus gives them back their lives.

All ten are cured, but only one, the Samaritan, fully experiences his healing as a moment of salvation; a moment when the mercy of God has broken into his life. Jesus says that it is the Samaritan's faith that enables him to see what the other nine do not. The man is so moved by this realisation that he turns back to Jesus breaking into shouts of joy, praising God at the top of his voice.

The Samaritan's faith has drawn him deeper into his relationship with God who heals him and sets him free. And that is God's great desire for each of us.

The way of Jesus (and, therefore, of his disciples) is not to exclude, but to proclaim God as the God of all by working for healing, restoration and the good of all people. And to recognise and celebrate the presence of God we read in the concrete realities of our lives.