28th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Readings Year C: 2Kings 5:14-17, 2Timothy 2:8-13 & Luke 17:11-19
Theme: Naaman, the Syrian, and the Samaritan man are models of Gratitude and Faith in God/Jesus

Gratitude and faith in God/Jesus are the main themes in the readings, especially the first reading and the Gospel of this 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time. These two people with leprosy--Naaman in the first reading and a Samaritan man in the Gospel who is unnamed--are models of gratitude and faith in God for us all.

Leprosy was considered a terrible disease in the ancient world and even today in some developing countries. During the time of Jesus, those with leprosy were deemed cursed by God. They were ostracized from the community and had to tie a bell around their ankles. They had to shout, "Unclean, unclean" (Lev 13:45-46) to alert the public to stay away from them. They suffered not only from the disease but also from isolation and shame from their community.
In the first reading, we hear of the healing of Naaman of his leprosy. He was a Syrian and the chief commander of their military. He was highly successful in his career and highly respected. Unfortunately, later in his life, he suffered from this terrible disease. It was a Hebrew slave girl saving him that told him of prophet Elisha in her hometown that would cure him of his leprosy. In short, through the advice of this Hebrew girl, Naaman was cured of his leprosy and discovered that: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel." A great profession of faith! God's healing of Naaman, a non-Jew, tells us that we serve an impartial God. We're all his children.

Sometimes, through sickness/difficult times, some people discover God and become believers/Christians. Naaman is a perfect example of someone who, through his painful ailment and recovery, discovered the true God. Naaman, a foreigner, accepted the God of Israel, not the gods of Syria, as the mighty God throughout the earth. He did not end with his profession of faith in a mighty God but brought gifts to thank the prophet Elisha for healing him. Elisha refused to accept these gifts because, for him, it was God who has healed Naaman. Hence, the thanks and praise belong to God alone. Naaman acknowledged this and offered a sacrifice of thanks and praise to the God of heaven and earth, not to his god in Syria.

The first reading, as you may notice, often leads us to the Gospel reading. The healing of the ten people with leprosy is found only in Luke's Gospel. According to Luke, Jesus was traveling through Samaria and Galilee to Jerusalem when he met these ten people with leprosy: nine Jews and a Samaritan. During the time of Jesus, Jews and Samaritans had no contact with one another, though Samaria was in the central part of Judea. The Jews looked down on Samaria. It is interesting that in today's Gospel, we read of nine Jewish people with leprosy and one Samaritan person with leprosy living together. It is sad, but it is true that sometimes adversity/challenges in life forces us to drop our differences/prejudices.

When the ten people with leprosy saw Jesus, they cried out to him saying: "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us." They recognized Jesus would be able to restore them, not only to physical healing, but also give them spiritual/emotional healing that they needed. Yes, their faith in Jesus paid off. They were cured of their leprosy but only the Samaritan came back to thank Jesus. Jesus then asked, "Ten were cleansed, were they not? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" Jesus is not looking for their gratitude/appreciation but for them to thank God who has healed them. Jesus then praised the Samaritan man for thanking and praising God for granting him healing.

Fellow parishioners, are we grateful to God for all his blessings to us, even though we are unworthy of his blessings? When was the last time you acknowledged the gift of life God has blessed you with? It is said that those who are grateful and thankful are happy people. They have a healthy lifestyle. I think that if you do not know how to show appreciation to someone who deserves your appreciation, you will not know how to thank God for his blessings.
For us Catholics, the Eucharistic celebration is our highest prayer of thanksgiving to God and his beloved son, Jesus Christ.

With gratitude and faith in God, we will be able to live a life in Christ that St. Paul talks about in the second reading. He was not afraid to suffer and die for Christ because he is thankful for Christ saving his life. As we celebrate the Mass, let us remember it is our greatest form of thanksgiving to God for all his blessings upon us. May our Holy Mother Mary and her beloved husband, St. Joseph, continue to intercede for us to always be grateful to the Triune God.