

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time— C Cycle
2004

October 10,

INTRODUCTION - Every now and then we hear about conflict between Israel and Syria. This is nothing new. Our first reading takes us back to 850 BC when they were fighting. Syria was then called Aram. Our reading is about a general in the Aramean army named Naaman. He had the dreaded disease of leprosy. Naaman's wife had a slave girl who was an Israelite. She was probably captured in battle. She told Naaman about a prophet in Israel who would be able to cure Naaman's disease. That prophet was Elisha. It must have taken a lot of humility and faith for this proud Aramean general to go into the territory of their enemy looking for Elisha. And when he located him, Elisha wouldn't even meet Naaman. He just told him through a messenger to go and bathe in the Jordan River. Naaman was insulted. He said the rivers in his country were far superior to the Jordan and he decided to go back home. But his friends persuaded him to do as the prophet said. Thus our first reading begins.

HOMILY - The term 'leprosy' was attached to a variety of skin diseases in biblical times. And since skin diseases can be very contagious, a person who had 'leprosy' had to live away and stay away from healthy people. They had no income, no job, no family and no friends except for others with the same disease. Since some skin diseases were not the real disease of leprosy, sometime the person's skin problem cleared up and they could be readmitted back into society with the approval of a Jewish priest.

The miracle in today's gospel was not instantaneous as most of Jesus' healings were. Rather, it was a test of faith for the lepers. For Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priest to be declared 'clean.' It was while they were on their way that they were healed. It was more than their health they got back. They could reenter society, go home to their family and friends, their occupations and their worshipping community. When only one out of the ten returned to give thanks, Jesus sounds deeply disappointed. It wasn't for personal reasons that he was troubled. He was saddened in that only one returned "to give thanks to God."

I'm sure many of you can remember, as I can remember, a time when going to Mass on Sunday was of the highest priority. Starting somewhere in the late 1960's, many people began to see devotion to the Eucharist as a kind of optional devotion. The attitude for many today is if there's nothing worth watching on TV or none of the kids are involved in sports, or if I'm not able to sleep any later, I might just decide to go to Mass. In many years as a priest, I have seen over and over that when people start treating the Mass as something of secondary importance, the rest of their spiritual life and their faith goes downhill. The Mass is essential to our faith as Catholic Christians. The Second Vatican Council summarized it so clearly: "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows." (Pp 10).

You may at this point wonder why I am suddenly talking about the Eucharist or the Mass. The Holy Father has asked that today we begin a Year devoted to the Eucharist. So you might hear a little more about the Eucharist in the weeks and months ahead. From my perspective, we all need to focus more on the Eucharist. Even those people for whom the Mass is important can profit from understanding the Mass a little better, for the essence of our faith is right here. The theme in today's gospel gives us a good starting point for talking about the Eucharist. Jesus was saddened that only one of the people who had been healed "returned to give thanks to God." We have many reasons why we're here. Maybe we're observing a Commandment which says to "Keep holy the Lord's day." Maybe we like to have a few moments of quiet in our busy lives and get a chance to regroup. Maybe we like to pray with our family. Maybe we have some special need and we know the Mass is the most powerful prayer there is. Surely whatever is the reason that brings us here, it is good. But primary among the reasons to come is to give thanks. The very word Eucharist (from the Greek 'ευχαριστία') means that. Sometimes we forget we come here not only to get something, to receive blessings, but to give something to God. You might ask what can we give to God who owns everything? One thing God does not own is our hearts unless we give them to God. And we do that through love, which expresses itself in obedience, love for others, praise and thanksgiving. The wonder of all this is that even as we give, we receive,

for God is not a God who takes the gifts we give and puts them away in a big vault. No, God gives back a hundredfold. This is even true of gratitude. When we give gratitude to God, we get back joy. A grateful person is a joyful person. An ungrateful person is a person who is unhappy. Gratitude is the only key to joy. Do you want real joy? Be grateful. And there's no greater act of gratitude than the Eucharist. We express our gratitude not only for the blessings we enjoy each day, but the Mass makes us aware of all that God has given to us and plans to give us through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

In closing I want to mention our offertory hymn. This hymn is not in our books but is printed on the Liturgy Bulletin. It was commissioned by our Archdiocese for the Jubilee Year in 2000 and is appropriate for us today as we begin the year of the Eucharist.

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle

October 31, 2004

INTRODUCTION: The first two lines of our first reading are telling **us** about God, that God is much greater than even the whole universe. Then the rest of the reading speaks to God, praising God for his greatness, especially for his mercy. That mercy is illustrated for us in the gospel as Jesus touches the heart of Zacchaeus.

HOMILY: I spent this past week on retreat at a Trappist monastery in Gethsemani near Bardstown, KY. It is a very prayerful and inspiring place where 66 priests and brothers begin their day at 3:15 in the morning singing and praising God at Mass and divine office. They support themselves by making fruitcake, cheese and fudge. We priests are required to make an annual retreat. It is a good rule and I would recommend a retreat to anyone. Setting time aside for prayer is the only way to deepen our relationship with God and to grow in God's peace.

In connection with this idea, I would like to invite everyone to spend some time in church this coming weekend, as we celebrate our annual period of Eucharistic adoration. Especially this would be appropriate during this year devoted to the Eucharist. Fr. Ray Kammerer, a friend of mine for almost 50 years and a professor of history at Chatfield College, will speak at the closing ceremony. If you are coming to the closing next Sunday afternoon and would like to join the rest of us for spaghetti and meatballs in the cafeteria afterwards, we need to know how many

dinners to order. The dinner is free. You can't beat that! If you haven't already told us you are coming, just call the rectory today or tomorrow so we have a count of how many people to plan on.

Sometime tonight or tomorrow, lots of little kids (and grown up ones too) will be parading around in strange costumes, pretending to be witches or devils or kings or ghosts or what not. Today's gospel presents us with the picture of a man who spent most of his life masquerading as someone else. Zacchaeus was a little man, and as a tax collector he was despised by those who knew him. But he dedicated his life to trying to be a big shot. Now I'm sure collecting taxes is not a pleasant job, but at the time of Jesus, it was especially unpleasant. Tax collectors then were Jews who were gouging their fellow Jews in order to collect taxes for a hated foreign power, the Romans. They also had to make up their own salary by what they collected, and some became very rich that way. Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, was quite successful in what he did. He thought he was a very important person and a big wheel until Jesus came along and he discovered who he really was. He gave up his masquerade as a big shot and his true self showed itself. He discovered his true worth was not in being a rich man but in being a good man. Jesus has a way of bringing out the best in all of us.

Now I want to abruptly shift gears. As you know Tuesday is the day we vote. I can see some of you thinking I don't want to hear about politics. I've heard enough already! Well, I'm not going to talk too long about it. The other day one of my priest friends mentioned something about one of the issues people will be voting on and he got a letter the next day from someone complaining that she came to church to hear about God, not about politics. She said "Ask the other parishioners if they think as I do. If they are intelligent and honest they will agree with me!" Even though our Lord said "Render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God," some issues are both political as well as moral or ethical. I'm not going to talk about issues or parties today. I think we all know the Church's position on most issues. I simply want to talk about the *need* to vote. And if you're wondering whether that has anything to do with God, I would say it does. If we, who are spiritual, are not going to be light of the world and salt of the earth, who will be? While I was on retreat, I read a book about Blessed John XXIII. He said true patriotism was "a form of brotherly love." By our vote we have a part in determining who makes the laws all of our brothers and sisters in this land have to live by. And Blessed John XXIII said the greatness of any country can shine forth only in "justice embodied in law." Our concern should be that justice is reflected in our laws.

If you will indulge me just a few more minutes I want to share with you an e-mail I received from my cousin. The title of this was "...and then he voted."

A guy was interested in buying a house and while the real estate agent was showing it he asked which direction was north. He didn't want the sun waking him up every morning. The agent asked him "does the sun rise in the north?" He told her "no, it usually rises in the east." The agent said, "Oh, I don't keep up with that stuff." Then she voted.

A lady who was working in a technical support service received a call one day. The man who was calling asked what hours the center was open. The lady on the other end of the phone answered "our office is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week." Then the caller asked "Is that Eastern or Central time?" To eliminate any useless conversation she answered "Uh...Eastern." Then he voted.

There was a man looking for his luggage at the airport baggage area and couldn't find it. So he went to a woman working in the lost luggage office to report that his luggage was lost. She was very pleasant and smiling told him not to worry, there are trained professionals that handle those kind of things. Then she asked him "Has your plane arrived yet?" Then she voted.

A guy was driving through Florida and got quite a sun burn. He was in his convertible with the top down, but he didn't think he would get burned, because he was moving. Then he voted.

What's my point? I'm not trying to imply that I never say or do things that are less than brilliant, and I'm not begrudging anyone their right to vote. I'm only trying to say America needs people like you and me to get out there and vote too!