

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Another one of my favorite stories in all of Scripture. I like the many levels of meaning present and how the richness of the narrative seems almost inexhaustible.

At one level of meaning we can find the importance of giving thanks for gifts received. At another the willingness of Jesus to meet us where we are: the lepers ask for healing, and Jesus responds.

The place where reading the passage has taken me this time around has to do with second chances.

Let's review: The lepers call out for Jesus to have pity on them—Jews and the one Samaritan are all in the same boat at this point.

He responds, "Go show yourselves to the priests." The priests were the gatekeepers to the community. If they pronounced the lepers clean they would be readmitted. They could take up their former lives again.

As they were going, they were cleansed. The priests would be able to pronounce them clean and readmit them.

And then a choice was made.

What would you do if you had been made clean? Would you praise and thank God for sending a master healer like Jesus into your path just when you needed him most, and then run on to your family from whom you have been separated for...how long?

Seems like a fairly common response, and one we would have trouble finding fault with.

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This is like the person who goes through a dramatic event—an accident that he should never have walked away from, or fighting and beating a cancer diagnosis, or something along those lines. When the trauma is over we are happy, even grateful, to pick up our lives where we left off, and proceed to move forward in them.

The Samaritan represents a different response. For him, the healing means that going back to his old life is not an option. He has encountered a person whom he discerns to be more than a healer, but someone who has changed him, someone worth his gratitude and allegiance. The Samaritan is so changed by the experience that he's ready to become a follower of Jesus.

This sort of response is still available and people take it. They come through the traumatic event seeing the world and their place in it, their faith and their relationships in a new light—one which precludes just going back and picking up where they left off.

One of the best bits of advice I got when I was in my chaplaincy internship was to be ready for people who are on the move spiritually. A stay in the hospital, which takes out of our normal routine and circle of activities, can precipitate one of those moments when the ordinary gives way to deeper reflection on the meaning of life. With some help a person can come out of the hospital changed, even when their medical condition has not.

They might look at their situation differently, come to

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

greater peace about it, use it as an impetus to work on their relationships, be reconciled to God in spite of it—all sorts of things can happen.

The good news is that we really don't even need a close call to open up the moment of grace. Any number of occurrences could be used as the spur, not to pick up where we left off, but to go forward into the kingdom living that was on Jesus' agenda throughout the encounter.

Even hearing this Gospel and reflecting on it could be enough for the person who is ready to embrace the opportunity it holds.

When a person gets a second chance, he or she usually has a heightened sense that the time of their life is limited, and that the time is now.

Whether we come to that realization because of some dramatic event or not, that is in fact the truth of the matter for all of us.

In this moment, before we head out of Mass for our favorite Sunday morning venue, we can praise God for the life that he has given us, a life that is not our own. We can thank Jesus for calling us out of the isolation of the life we've known so far—as good as it might be it's not the whole story—and become more serious about allowing his way of life to have influence on our own.

The “now” moment slumbers in every minute. Will we seize it?