

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

## 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

### **First reading**

(2 Kings 5.14-17)

*Naaman the Syrian*

This little excerpt is the stub end of one of the most-delightful stories in the Bible (read it!). It pairs with the gospel reading.

In his opening proclamation in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus declares that he has come to save the gentiles too, just as Elisha did, citing Naaman as an example. Today we read just the cure itself. The odd bit about 'two mule-loads of earth' is the result of the belief, still persistent at that time, that the God of Israel could be worshipped only on the soil of Israel - so take some soil with you! Naaman wants to express his gratitude at home, too.

At that time the Lord was accepted as God of Israel, the Sovereign and Protector of Israel, but this implied nothing about other nations. It was not until the Babylonian Exile, when Israel was confronted by the multiple gods of Babylon, that Israel advanced a step and saw that the Lord was the God of the whole earth, the whole universe, and that all the other deities, such as sun and moon and stars, were simply timing devices plugged into the vault of heaven by the Lord himself. God reveals himself to Israel, and to us, gradually.

### **Question:**

*How has your faith deepened or developed in the last years?*

### **Second reading:**

(2 Timothy 2.8-13)

*The Grounds for Hope*

If Paul is chained as a criminal, at least he gives the grounds for his hope and his security: 'The saying is sure.' The kernel of the Good News is the Resurrection, and that is enough. If Christ is risen from the dead, no more is required; this in itself is the fulfilment of the promises to David.

Paul then quotes a little symmetrical hymn that was no doubt sung by the early Christian congregations. The earliest external evidence to the Christian liturgy is a letter from Pliny, governor of a province in what is now northern Turkey, in the early second century, only a few decades after Second Timothy. He has examined Christians under torture and sends his findings to the Emperor: they meet on a set day (presumably Sunday), make oaths of loyalty to one other, sing a hymn 'to Christ as to a God', and then have a meal (presumably the Eucharist).

The last lines of this reading could be part of just such a hymn, under the pressures of persecution, celebrating the union of Christ with his followers, and Christ's fidelity to his own people, whatever they do to him.

### **Question:**

*If we are faithless, he remains faithful.*

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## **Gospel:**

*(Luke 17.11-19)*

### *The Samaritan Leper*

Now we see why the story of the cure of Naaman the leper formed the first reading: in the gospel reading, we find another cure of a foreigner, and not an ordinary foreigner, but a hated foreigner. There was a cordial hatred between Jews and Samaritans - a wretched hybrid race, who accepted only part of the Jewish Bible, and had their own ideas about the coming Messiah.

Yet we have already had the story of the Good Samaritan, who succours the wounded traveller, neglected by Jewish priest and Levite. Now only a Samaritan comes back to thank Jesus for the cure from leprosy. Samaritans are the foreigners geographically nearest to Jesus, but hated by the Jews. If the Samaritans can set an example to the Jews, so can many other foreigners.:

In his initial proclamation, Jesus promises salvation to the gentiles, and Luke misses no opportunity to show us gentiles ripe for salvation, the centurion of Capernaum who built the synagogue and whose son is cured, the guests for the banquet, called in from highways and byways. He is preparing for the second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, where the Good News will spread to the ends of the earth, to Rome itself

## **Question:**

*Is any race superior to any other? Why or why not?*

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