

**Year C Oct. 10, 2010 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
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The readings this Sunday have to do with foreigners and their faith. It is a timely topic and it is not the first time this column has treated it. In the first reading, Naaman was a Syrian, oftentimes enemies of Israel. Elisha, the Israelite prophet, was God's instrument in "cleaning" him of his leprosy (in biblical times, "leprosy" was the name of a variety of skin diseases and not primarily what today is called "Hansen's disease," what St. Damien of Molokai contracted in his work in Hawaii). Note that when the king of Israel heard that the king of Syria ("Aram") was sending him a leper to cure, the king of Israel was astounded at being asked to do something only God could do, 2 Kgs 5:7. But Elisha was eager to show that God has his prophets in Israel and curing someone of leprosy was thus not impossible. Naaman the pagan ends up converted to the true God of Israel.

And the psalm invites us then to "sing a new song," for the Lord has shown his might to the pagan nations, too. God indeed is faithful, and although God may treat us as we deserve at times for our own good (that is, giving us a taste of our own medicine), his essence is fidelity and He cannot deny himself, as the second reading says.

The Gospel reading is interesting. Mark in chapter one tells us about a leper who believes that Jesus can "clean" him, and Jesus does cure him and tells him to go show the priests that he is now able to join the worshipping community as a ritually clean person. Luke tells us about ten such lepers going around together; as unclean persons, they had to stay away from villages (see the legislation in Lv 14). Jesus in Mark, heedless of contracting impurity, touches the leper to heal him (he lets an "unclean" woman with a blood flow touch him in Mk 5:21-34; see Lv 15:25-27). In Luke, Jesus doesn't even have to go near the lepers; his command is enough to heal them. Again, his command is to show themselves to the Jewish priests, who inspected lepers carefully to certify they were "clean." What is interesting is that the nine "native" lepers, once they are clean, do not think of thanking Jesus or glorifying God: only a "foreigner," a Samaritan—who by the way was in any case unwelcome in the Jewish worship places—comes back to "do the right thing" with Jesus. Jesus tells him to "arise" (a resurrection word) and that his faith has saved him.