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**From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.**

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# Healing of Dreaded Diseases

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## **Healing of Dreaded Diseases**

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**Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
Sunday Readings for October 13, 2013 for Cycle C:  
2 Kgs 5:14-17; Ps 98:1-4; 2 Tim 2:8-13; Lk 17:11-19

## **HEALING OF DREADED DISEASES**

*Lawrence E. Frizzell*

"Miracle at Carville." About sixty years ago the true story of a young American woman described how her life was shattered by the diagnosis of Hansen's disease. Leprosy! Until 1960 it was incurable and the stigma of millennia hung over those afflicted. Today many in our society manifest the same fear and rejection of those suffering from AIDS. So the readings in today's liturgy are pertinent for all; especially important is the message of divine mercy for the people who feel unloved because of personal tragedy in their lives.

The great prophet Elijah and his disciple Elisha shared God's teaching with the people of Israel and its neighbors during the ninth century B.C. The lessons contained in the text about Naaman cannot be appreciated fully unless the entire episode is recalled (2 Kgs 5:1-27). He was a general in the army of Aram, whose principal city was Damascus. Rank or valor did not exempt him when a serious skin affliction but probably not Hansen's disease struck. An Israelite slave girl in his household praised the wonderful powers of Elisha. When Naaman came, the prophet instructed him to bathe seven times in the Jordan River in order to be healed. Naaman was insulted! Elisha had not even deigned to see him personally and the rivers of Damascus were much more impressive than the Jordan. His servants argued for humility and common sense. "If the prophet would have told you to do something extraordinary, would you not have done it?" So the general was cured and acknowledged the God of Israel to be the only God. He returned to thank and reward the prophet but his gifts were not accepted. Elisha would not seek gain from the exercise of spiritual powers; his servant Gehazi sought to enrich himself, however - and he was struck with the disease.

Naaman's faith would be expressed in sacrificial worship, so he asked to take earth back to Damascus, probably to construct an altar (see Ex 20:24). The symbolic redemptive efficacy of soil from the Holy Land became important to Jews in the Dispersion (see Deuteronomy 32:43); Naaman's request probably indicates a desire to unite with the place where the true God is revered.

Leprosy and other skin ailments were scrutinized by the priests who had the authority to declare whether a person had been healed (Lv 14:1-9). Until that "certificate of good health" was given the individual would be under quarantine, living apart from the community (Lv 13:45-46). Understandably, such unfortunate people would band together, without the usual distinction between Jew and Samaritan. Jesus' reputation had reached even such an isolated group (see Luke 5:12-16) so they implored him for mercy. Although Jesus would touch a leper to heal the person, in this case he merely commanded that they seek out a priest. This demanded an act of faith, which was elicited without questioning. The Jews continued to seek a "health certificate" but the Samaritan returned to Jesus rather than go to Mount Gerizim where his priests presided. The Jews

would offer the prescribed sacrifices in the Temple in gratitude for their cure (see Leviticus 14:4) and then return home to their families. Would they not recount the miracle of their cure? Probably. But they would not come to know Jesus or see the meaning of his works and teachings. "The blind gain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (Mt 11:5). The purpose of Jesus was to bring healing to people so that they would recognize that the kingdom of God was in their midst (Lk 17:21) and come to know that the Messiah had come.

Like Naaman, the Samaritan was an outsider who benefited from a miraculous healing which led to faith. Physical health allowed the person to worship God and live according to a new vision of life's meaning. "Your faith has been your salvation!" The Samaritan could join the disciples of Jesus only after the resurrection (see Acts 8:4-8) but in the meantime he could prepare his own people to know Jesus, as the Samaritan woman did (Jn 4:39-40).

Christians today may ask whether they cannot learn from the example of people around them. Do we take the privileges of our intimacy with God for granted? On hearing what Catholics believe about the Eucharistic presence of Christ, a Hindu remarked: "If I believed that, I would come into the church on my knees!" Do we express heart-felt gratitude for the healing presence of Christ with us? Do we bring the hope and friendship of Jesus to those ostracized by our society?