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“Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine?” (Luke 17:18).

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[2 Kgs 5:14-17](#); [Ps 98](#); [2 Tm 2:8-13](#); [Luke 17:11-19](#)

The gospel story of Jesus’ encounter with the 10 lepers is certainly about the importance of gratitude, but there are other dimensions to it as well. One of these is Jesus’ outreach to those on the margins. Lepers were some of the most outcast people in a society fearful of contagion. They were “unclean” physically, driven out of the community and even their own families, but also seen as under judgment from God. Curiously, among them is a Samaritan leper, twice outcast for his disease and as a hated foreigner, yet part of the motley group of Jewish lepers.

Jesus lets these “untouchables” approach close enough to cry out for pity. He sends them to the priests to show themselves for validation as fit to reenter the community, and on the way, they discover that they have been healed. The nine Jewish ones go joyfully as instructed to the priests, but the Samaritan, awestruck that even *he* was healed by this Jewish preacher Jesus, returns to thank him.

He falls at Jesus’ feet. Something more than a physical healing has occurred: The Samaritan leper has been “saved.” He has felt and responded to the deeper gift of eternal life flowing from Jesus. “Stand up and go, your faith has saved you,” Jesus says. The Samaritan has been “raised up” beyond human healing to new life in union with Jesus. The other nine were healed, but they have yet to understand the

deeper invitation to eternal life that comes with faith in Jesus.

Pope Francis' call to leave the comfort zone at the center to go to the margins of the church is explicit in today's Gospel. Jesus is among the outcasts, the poor, the unclean, aliens, refugees and strangers, regardless of their race or religious faith. To welcome them, even sinners and enemies, is to accompany Jesus beyond the borders of theological and cultural security in a world polarized by fear. This is where the Good News is needed and where we come alive to the new life Jesus gives to us as disciples.

May our eucharistic assemblies and pulpits ring out with the joy of the gospel this weekend, and may our communities welcome the rich human diversity God draws to Jesus every day. We are all untouchable until we know the healing touch he gives freely to anyone who comes to him. Once blessed, our own touch extends to others the same compassion and risen life we have received. This is the meaning of our baptismal cleansing and mission to the world.

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