



Homily for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, C

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Obedience and Healing

Did you know that there is a way to walk from Rome to Jerusalem in one step? I've done it. And if you ever go to Rome, you can too, if you visit one particular church in the northeast corner of the ancient city. When you walk into the ancient Church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, you are standing—quite literally—on the soil of Jerusalem. St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, brought back earth from Calvary Hill in Jerusalem and had it spread over the ground where she intended to build the church that would house the relics of the Passion of Jesus, most especially the relic of the True Cross. She wanted Rome, the heart of the empire, to have within it a portion of the Holy Land, so that every step in that church was a step on sacred ground. In that mysterious way, the Church proclaims that through the Cross, every place can become holy. The soil of suffering found in every life can likewise become the ground of redemption.

In today's readings we hear two stories of men confronted by suffering. And this suffering—leprosy—is one of the most reviled and loathsome ways to suffer. In the time of their greatest need, people who suffered in this way were cast out and made to dwell apart from the rest of the community. We hear the story of Naaman the Syrian and the ten lepers seeking a remedy from God. They all come to find healing—but they find it in unexpected ways. Naaman, a powerful general, is told by Elisha to bathe seven times in the muddy waters of the Jordan. He bristles at the thought: surely the prophet should have performed a more immediate and bold miracle, calling on God dramatically! He argues in pride that the rivers in Syria are better than the Jordan. He has to be persuaded by his entourage to drop his arrogant pride and obey what the prophet says. And so he finally does it—and is cured. Likewise, the lepers cry out to Jesus for mercy, and rather than perform an ostentatious miraculous cure on the spot for all to see and be amazed, He simply tells them to go show themselves to the priests. No instant miracle, no spectacle. Just obedience.

And yet, it is obedience that heals—not the grandeur of the gesture, but the humility of faith. Naaman humbles himself and descends into the waters, and his flesh is made clean. The lepers begin walking toward the priests in trust, and along the way they are made whole. Faith is born in obedience, even when that obedience feels beneath us.

We must remember that God often speaks through those whom He has placed in authority—even when their words or decisions are hard to accept. The test of obedience is not agreement but trust: if this comes from God's order, then I will find grace in it. Every act of humble obedience reopens the Jordan River within us, cleansing the proud-will that keeps grace at bay.

When we submit in faith, something remarkable happens: what was sterile becomes fruitful. Naaman not only regains his health; his heart is converted. He returns to the prophet declaring, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel." The one healed leper, a Samaritan, returns glorifying God, falling at Jesus' feet in gratitude. From obedience blooms worship. Disobedience dries the soul, but obedience, even painful obedience, makes life green again. It turns sorrow into thanksgiving, disappointment into deeper trust. In every act of surrender, faith bears fruit.

Naaman's story doesn't end with his healing. He asks for a load of Israel's soil to take home with him, so that when he prays, he may kneel upon holy ground. The man who once despised the Jordan in prideful arrogance now treasures its very dirt. So it is with us: through Baptism we are plunged into the true Jordan, into Jesus's death



and resurrection. We, too, carry holy ground within us. We are the new temple, the new Jerusalem, living tabernacles of God's presence. Even in suffering, even when we feel exiled or misunderstood, we carry within us the soil of Calvary—the place where obedience and love met and redeemed the world.

That means our sorrow can become a sanctuary. Our disappointments, when united to Christ, can become a place of worship. When we obey in faith, we transform the barren places of life into gardens of grace.

The Cross planted in the soil of Rome, the waters of the Jordan, and the altar on which we now stand are all signs of the same mystery: obedience born of faith makes us holy. When we submit to God's will, even through the imperfect voices of authority, He can heal the leprosy of pride, bitterness, and rebellion. He can make the hardened heart fruitful again. And when that happens, like Naaman and the grateful leper, we return glorifying God. We worship not because life is easy, but because Christ has made even our suffering a doorway to joy. We are standing on holy ground because the Cross has made it so.