

Again this week on this I am inspired by the insightfulness of Bishop Robert Barrons, who bring to light the great story of Naaman, the Syrian General and Elisha the great prophet of Israel! And offers us a wonderful spiritual commentary on the story we read this morning and taken from the 2nd Book of Kings.

Naaman is a powerful commander of the entire Syrian army. He is the enemy of Israel. **To reach his stature, he is obviously accomplished, smart, courageous and feared. And he has leprosy!** As a man of power and influence, he now suffers the humiliating, debilitating and disfiguring disease. Leprosy mortified the population but can you **image how it would have affected Naaman's authority, power and status?**

It is here that we find our first spiritual lesson. **We all have leprosy!!!** No matter who you are, no matter who high a status you obtain, we are all afflicted with a physical ailment, a psychological struggle, an obsession, an addiction or a hurt that consumes us. We all have something that is, as St. Paul describes his, a thorn in our side.

And here is the lesson: **very often it is precisely the thorn or weakness that brings us to God! Our very strengths can be a weakness that prevents us from turning to God and being healed. Naaman was very accomplished, but it is not in his accomplishments that he will find his strength, it will be in his weakness, his leprosy.**

How does this make any sense? Well, his weakness brings him to humility. And how is that good? Well remember **the capital sin is pride**, not sexual sin as we like to believe. **And the remedy to pride is humility. Humility is the greatest virtue.** When I lower myself in the presence of God, I open myself to the influence, or the salvation of God.

Now watch the story of Naaman as it unfolds, at **every turn Naaman is going to be humbled.** And it is he very weakness that will lead him along the path to salvation.

The first step, he **hears from this little Israelite slave girl** of a powerful prophet who might be able to heal him. Think of this, the powerful, Syrian General hears from a girl, who is an Israelite girl, who is a slave Israelite girl. She is about as low

on the social scale as is possible and yet she is the one who speaks to him about this healing prophet. In his humility, he says ok, I'll listen to you. Naaman the great, will take advice from this little nobody.

Taking her advice, he comes into Israel, Naaman the great general, enemy to Israel, and **goes to the King of Israel, who** wonders aloud, "what the heck are you doing here? You want to be healed? You are undoubtedly spying on us, to find our weaknesses so that you can attack us." The king **berates and humiliates Naaman**. And Naaman takes it! He could have in his pride stormed off and raised his army against the king for the great insult he had to endure.

Now in the meantime **Elisha hears of Naaman** and his requests and sends a messenger with the instruction to go and bath in the Jordan seven times. Now remember the status of Naaman, the great warrior, a legion. Elisha does not go in person to grant his request, but **sends a flunky!** And Naaman notices! What, the prophet can come himself, he sends a messenger? Might he not come in person, and lay his hands on me or utter a prayer? And now he wants me to wash in the river of this foreign lands. Are not the rivers or Damascus better than all the rivers of Israel? And his pride is stirred up yet again.

And this again is a key moment, when he might have stormed off. He could have said, I have had it with this whole process.

But Naaman says, ok, I will do what the prophet has told me, **through his flunky, to bath in this second rate stream seven times.**

And then we hear this, **"his flesh became like the flesh of a child and he was cleansed of his leprosy."**

The story begins with a man with a debilitating disease, the door to healing was in humility. Sister and Brother, it is in your weakness that we find the path to God. In following the path of humility and suffering a series of humiliations Naaman is finally healed.

His suffering, his embarrassment, his thorn in his side is healed precisely by the quelling of his pride and his submission to the will of God.

Easy? Not at all, but when are any of the spiritual lessons easy? We are all prideful, we all reside the path of humility, but by that path we are healed!

The Story goes on, so Naaman exults in his cure, and asks for a load on soil to bring back to his native land. **So what is the end here? Not simply the healing of a disease but to move a person to the praise of God.** Naaman brings the soil from Israel, to remind him of his humility, and of the day God healed him.

And that is the goal of all our spiritual journeys. To reach the goal of submitting to the will of God and offering all right praise to the God, who is living and true.

And so now a nod to the Gospel of today, where Jesus heals the lepers of his day. Ten Lepers call out, **“Jesus, Master have pity on us.”** How and why are they cured? You see it in the call out to Jesus, in their humility.

You see I can't do this myself, I can't heal myself! All I can do is call out in humility. **We echo these lepers call of humility each time we come to Mass, and utter the words, Lord have Mercy, Christ have Mercy, Lord have Mercy. I can't do this myself, I need your mercy, Lord.**

He heals all ten, but only one, the Samaritan the outsider, comes back to give thanks. **And what is thanksgiving, but another act of humility.**

To acknowledge, in humility the one who is merciful and heals. The Eucharist, which means, **Thanksgiving, is an act of humility, to come before the Lord in obedience, in our sins, in our need to receive life again, through Him.**

So what is your leprosy? What eats at you? What is your thorn in the flesh? Go there to find the path of humility that will lead you to spiritual healing.

And finding your humility, maybe we can offer those around us, who also are lepers some compassion, kindness and patience. For they too are on the path to humility, healing and the praise of God.

Amen!