

## Epiphany 6B (2/15/09 – Jesus – Epiphanied as the One Who Cleanses)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

In our *Old Testament Lesson* for this *Sixth Sunday after Epiphany*, we have the account of the miraculous cleansing of a leper named Naaman. And by this miracle, the one and only God is *Epiphanied as the One Who Cleanses!* There are several miracles here, actually. And by this event the Lord shows not only that He is the One Who cleanses ... but also that He is in control ... always ... even when things might seem otherwise ... even and especially when we think things are out of control.

Now as the story starts out, Naaman would seem to be a man who has everything. He is commander of a great army. He is highly favored by his king. He is even the LORD'S instrument – you see, the Lord is **always** in control ... even, ultimately, of godless governments – for our text says: *by him the LORD had given victory to Syria* [2KGS 5.1c]. Naaman is *a mighty man of valor* our text says [5.1d] – God says ... since it's His Word. Everything seems wonderful for Naaman – who wouldn't want to be in his shoes ... especially given our current economic situation? He's not worried about his job – he's in the king's favor. And with the Syrian king's desire to expand his empire, Naaman has guaranteed work for as long as he wants.

But, Naaman has a serious problem. After setting up Naaman's "greatness", the Lord shows us that all the might of men is really nothing – you see, Naaman *was a leper* [5.1e]. Naaman was afflicted with a dreaded skin disease – one that caused everyone who saw him to avert their eyes (afraid to stare) ... one that might kill him. And when we hear the next part, we are tempted to think: *Well, it serves him right!* Our text goes on to say: *Now the Syrians on one of their raids carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife.* [5.2] This leprosy is Naaman's punishment for enslaving a little girl! We don't have to look any further to understand why Naaman is afflicted with such a terrible, incurable disease. He may be highly favored in the king's eyes ... his job may be secure ... he may be commander of the army ... and valiant – but he is an evil, godless man who enslaves little girls. *Yes, it serves him right!*

Ah, but before we are too quick in judging Naaman and writing him off, look at what comes next. Before we are too quick to think things are out of control – that the LORD has let things get out of **His** control – listen to the words of a little girl. *Would that my lord* – her master, Naaman – *were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy!* [5.3] *From the mouth of babes* – as Scripture says! This little, unnamed, slave girl will teach us how to view things rightly – in the account of Naaman ... and in our own lives. She does not say: *It*

*serves him right for enslaving me ... let him rot!* Rather – in keeping with the Commandments of God – she does not wish her neighbor (her master) hurt or harm (this disease) ... but would *help and support him in every physical need* [SC I.5]. And not only does she wish to help him who enslaved her – this is not a case of *Stockholm Syndrome* – but there is something even better for her leprous master ... he will come to know of the true God! This little girl not only teaches us patience and faith in the midst of trials and tribulations ... but also true care and love (even for a hateful neighbor) ... indeed, outreach: the love of God for the unlovable! This young girl – even in the midst of her quite unfair, seemingly out of control, situation – would be a blessing to her captor ... and reveals that the LORD is Lord over all ... and that He is able not only to cure leprosy, but also to make an unbelieving enemy of God into His friend.

At his **slave's** word – here is more irony – Naaman goes to the king and then to Israel ... and eventually comes before the prophet of God, Elisha. Naaman awaits something great – *Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the Name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.* [5.11] Naaman is disappointed and angry – for Elisha simply commands him (by messenger) to *Go and wash in the Jordan seven times* [5.10]. *Surely the waters of Damascus are better*, Naaman says, *better than all the waters of Israel ... Could I not wash in them and be clean?* [5.12] The answer is *NO*, of course – for it has not to do with the waters ... but with the Word and command and promise of God ... it has to do with God's chosen Means of Grace ... how **He** wishes to be *Epiphanied as the One Who Cleanses!* So – at the urging of another one of his servants – *he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the Word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean!* [5.14]

In our *Holy Gospel* for the day, a leper comes to Jesus ... somewhere in Galilee ... after our Lord has left Capernaum to *go on to the next towns, that He may preach there also* [MK 1.38]. No doubt this unnamed leper had heard of Jesus' miracles – the healing of Peter's feverish mother-in-law ... the casting out of demons. He implores Jesus ... kneeling in reverent honor and worship before Him: *If You will, You can make me clean.* [MK 1.40] Really, this is a wonderful request of faith – a request that reveals this man's faith in Jesus. For what the man says – according to the Greek – is something like this: *If ever, on any occasion, You will ... You wish ... You desire, You can ... You have the ability and power to ... make me clean!* This man does not doubt Jesus – nor does he demand how or when Jesus should cleanse him! He simply knows ... trusts ... and believes that Jesus can and will do so – whether now ... or later ... in this life ... or the next.

The *Gospel* says that Jesus, *moved with pity ... stretched out His hand and*

*touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."* [1.41] Jesus was moved to compassion – down to the very depths of His being. Jesus' compassion was so great that He felt it in His inward being. We might say that it was a gut-wrenching compassion. Jesus felt so much pity and compassion that it twisted His stomach in knots – it literally hurt Jesus to see people under the ravages of the curse of sin! So great is Christ's love for us! And unafraid of contamination – indeed, desiring to take upon Himself **all** our infirmities ... in addition to all our sin – Jesus reaches out and touches this unclean leper.

And so likewise today, dear Christians, your Lord and Savior is moved to compassion toward you. He knows all your hurts and pains and diseases. He feels all of your anxieties about each and every aspect of your life. He looks upon you with divine pity ... and reaches out ... stretches out His hand ... to touch you ... heal you ... cleanse you from all that ails you – especially your sin and the guilt that comes with it. Today – just like that day – is a microcosm of Christ's incarnation. The Son of God, the Word, *was made flesh and dwelt among us* – God reached out with His mighty Right Hand to touch us ... all of us ... all of mankind. He came to us when we were unable to come to Him – and He does so again today. He came to us to make the *Great Exchange* – His health for your infirmities ... His righteousness for your sin ... His holiness for your uncleanness ... His wounds for your healing ... His punishment for your salvation ... His death for your life. *I will* – I continually will and want and desire – *be clean ... be washed from sin and disease and death ... be thou cleansed!*

The PSALM appointed for this day – PSALM 30 ... which we did not hear – begins with these wonderful words of inspired David: *I will extol you, O LORD, for You have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me. O LORD my God, I cried to You for help, and You have healed me. O LORD, You have brought up my soul from Sheol; You restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.* [30.1–3] These words, given by the Lord to David, are **your** words as well! Your foes – your real and much more than temporal foes ... the devil and his evil minions ... the world and your own sinful flesh ... sickness and decay ... even death – **will not** rejoice over you in the end; for the Lord Himself **will draw you up** into heaven itself ... where satan and sin and sickness and even death will not be able to touch you ... forever! And even now, the Lord has **already** drawn you up – from the dominion of death ... even as He drew you through the waters of Holy Baptism by His Word up from your inborn sin and death into His eternal, heavenly kingdom.

Through the Holy Word – in the Gospel ... attached to the waters of Holy Baptism ... spoken in the words of Absolution ... in, with, and under the bread and the wine of the Holy Supper – through the Word your gracious Lord continually

touches your sin-leprous life with the soothing, healing balm of His eternal promise: ***I will; be clean!*** And again and again, that blessed and blessing touch of your Savior creates in you a clean heart ... and cleanses you from all unrighteousness! The leprosy of your sin is expelled from your body ... and mind ... and soul. And Jesus bids you to go and show yourself ... not to the priest – for He Himself is the eternal and great High Priest ... according to the order of Melchizedek. Instead, Christ would bid you to go and show yourself to the Father ... the One Who made Christ your High Priest forever! And as you stand before the Father, you find that your Savior has once again cleansed you from the leprosy of your sin! Once again, ***Jesus is Epiphanied as the One Who Cleanses!*** You are clean. You are whole. You are restored. You are saved! Both now ... and forever!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]