

**“But”** (2King 5:1-14; Mark 1:40-45)

\* The lectionary for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany recalls affecting love of our Saviour that has revealed itself in certain ways. Somehow in Mark ch.1 for instance, there Jesus healed the leper, also it says he stripped out the prophetic power from the false prophet in the synagogue (v.26); he healed Peter’s mother-in-law from fever (v.30); and he performed many other healings for those who were sick or possessed by demons, (v.34). Posting these therapeutic acts within the timing order we can notice that the healing from leprosy stands at the end of the list. In our day many scholars think that Mark gives us the chronological order of events. Therefore healing from leprosy as the last act of all healings discloses mystery of our restoration.

\* I found that the word “*mystery*” (in Greek μυστηριῶ) occurs 7 times in Ephesians. Here the word “*mystery*” exceeds in number compared with other books of the NT. In chapter 3 Paul wrote, “To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.”

\* A preacher can find several topics on these Sunday readings that are worthy to deliver. He might preach about Christ’s omnipotence, love and compassion; he might illustrate Jesus as the healer of our physical and spiritual diseases, or he might focus on Jesus who broke down religious “pros and cons” regarding the purity system; he also might preach about our physical and spiritual restoration to God. I was puzzled from the beginning thinking over all these. Finally, I chose the exclusive one calling it - “*paradoxes*.”

\* Now, we begin from the (2 King 5:1-14) that comes first in our lectionary. It says that Naaman, the Syrian, suffering from some kind a skin disorder, has gone to the king of Israel. The official sent him to Elisha, the prophet, to heal his flesh. Upon being told to wash in the Jordan he erupts with rage but is persuaded to take Elisha's advice, he immerses himself in the Jordan seven times, and his flesh becomes once more like a little child's. It is hard to fully comprehend Naaman’s great joy of having been restored from skin disease; we only have a record of what he said, “Now I know, that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.”

\* In addition our text says that Naaman brought very valuable things to pay off because he didn’t have an international “Health Insurance.” Here it is what he put in his handbag: ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothes. According traditional way of thinking he did right. In this country, there is no way to receive treatment from malignant melanoma without paying back. The medical treatments in the US is very costly. It’s unbelievable, for an appointment with a pediatrician my grandson Parker paid \$ 600. But Naaman received the new skin “like a little child’s” without paying back, just for free. There were no chemotherapy or any painful and prolonged procedure. It was done in one moment after seven immersions. Thinking back to Mark it says that after asking for handouts the leper also received new skin for free. In both cases it was done by the same healer, the Son of God. And this joy can only break from them in thanksgiving, in rendering to our Saviour the thanks for their amazing healing; they were not asked to pay off.

\* Now those who discovered in Jesus the visible manifestation of God experienced also his love, compassion, and welcome. Usually God meets people in the midst of their suffering. This is what the former leper from Galilee discovered; In the midst of his despair and ongoing pain God's holiness made him clean! God's love isn't about avoiding contamination, but becoming involved in all of the muck and darkness of human experiences. The impurity of the leper did not make Jesus impure (as it assumes by the Law of Moses) but the purity of Jesus purified the impurity of the leper.

\* As it was mentioned before, both Naaman and the Galilean leper. due to experiencing restoration from dreadful disease were filled with great joy. This joy is incomparable, it can not be kept, it shouts loud, "Jesus is God, he made me clean, I will not be shamed." Alleluia! Even receiving the strict commandment "to say nothing to anyone," the leper couldn't zip his lips.

\* Unlike the demons who obeyed Jesus' words immediately this poor man went out of his head because of great joy. And Jesus understands our human nature. This joy is the shadow of eschatological joy the believers will experience after restoration from death! Unlike demons whose obedience doesn't give credit to them because they hate Jesus, our disobedience, due to of great joy or pain or lack of wisdom, will not count to us as transgressions because we love Jesus, (Joh21:15). Through faith and by faith we received immeasurable treasure, Jesus, who endures being afflicted for our salvation. He, the eternally begotten of the Father, becomes as a leper. In the sorrows of the cross, Christ becomes an outcast, a man buried in affliction. But in the brightness of Easter, his once-beaten flesh is made as new. In the brightness of our upcoming resurrection the mortal flesh will restore into likeness of Jesus Christ and we will like he is. "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is," (1Jn 3:2). Beginning from Christ's victorious resurrection up to now God's people are no longer defined by soil or by race, but by sharing the joy and thankfulness of the Risen Son of God.

\* Inasmuch as we come to the end of this sermon let's sum up the paradoxes. First and foremost, all deserve eternal condemnation because of disobedience **BUT** instead of this fact we continue to restore to God from the leprosy of our sins in virtue of Christ's satisfactio vicaria; we become one holy family awaiting the entire restoration from death. Beloved, praise God, Alleluia! Second, our impurities were not able to make Jesus impure due to the fact he took all our sins upon himself **BUT** instead we became pure and restore to God as beloved sons and daughters. Praise God, Alleluia! Third, we received salvation for free **BUT** it costs much, much more than all treasures of the world; it's equal in value to the innocent blood of the Lamb of God. Beloved, praise God, Alleluia! And finally, in spite of our physical suffering, sometimes misfortune, sometimes helpless, temptations, humiliations, and so and so **BUT!** We are so lucky people. Praise God in Christ Jesus. Alleluia!

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all,”  
(2Co 13:14). Amen.