

- Both our first reading and Gospel today present us with lepers being miraculously cured.
- In our first reading we have Naaman, a successful Syrian army general who's been persuaded by his household to seek healing from the prophet Elisha, while the Gospel presents the story of the 10 Samaritan lepers who are cured by our Lord as He passed through their village.
- These stories are important because they teach us about how to worship our Lord.
- The context for the first reading is that, when Naaman found Elisha, he was told by Elisha to go wash 7 times in the Jordan River, which is really just a muddy creek.
- Insulted and ready to return to his native Syria, whose rivers were much more impressive, Naaman was eventually persuaded to do as instructed. In humbly submitting to Elisha's instructions, Naaman is cured. And today's 1st reading shows us Naaman's gratitude.
- As for the 10 Samaritan lepers, when they approach Jesus for healing, Jesus follows the prescription of the Mosaic law by sending them to the priests. Yet even though all of them are cured, only one returns to give thanks.
- With both Naaman and the Samaritan leper of the Gospel, their gratitude leads them to worship. Gratitude is the underlying motive of their worship. In the case of Naaman, when his gift is refused, he asks for two mule-loads of earth to take back to Syria.
- It was the belief back then that the gods of various nations could only be worshipped on the soil of that nation. So, in order to worship solely the God of Israel as he intends, Naaman believes he needs the soil of Israel.
- The grateful Samaritan healed of leprosy in the Gospel shows his gratitude by falling at the feet of Jesus – an act of worship.
- It should be noted that both of the healed men we hear about in our readings were foreigners: one a Syrian, the other a Samaritan. They weren't Jews. But because they're cured of the worst physical affliction of their day, they're ready to convert and honor the true God.
- Note well that in our first reading there is important baptismal imagery. Just as Naaman was healed and converted by washing in Jordan's waters, we are healed of our sins and made one with Christ through the waters of baptism.
- In this we learn a little about how we are to approach our Lord so that we may worship properly. First, we must be cleansed and made pure to be prepared to worship our Lord.
- For the Israelites, being ritually pure was a requirement for them to practice their faith fully.
- This included not only a sense of physical cleanliness; it also presumed a moral purity: that one was not only following the Mosaic Law, but that one was living a life of moral integrity.
- And this notion of the necessity of being pure has made its way into the practice of our Faith as well. We see this expressed ritually at Mass during the Preparation of the Gifts before the Eucharistic Prayer when the altar servers wash the hands of the priest.
- While the washing that takes place looks like a physical cleansing, silently the priest is praying: "Lord, wash away my iniquity; cleanse me from all my sin" – indicating that his real intention is to be morally pure.
- Yet, even before offering Mass, priests traditionally wash their hands, praying as they do: "Give virtue, O Lord, to my hands, that every stain may be wiped away; that I may serve You without defilement of mind or body."
- But it's not only the priest who is obliged to be pure at Mass. All of us are to be pure. While all people, regardless of their moral state, are welcome to come to Mass, in order to be in full

communion with the Church and thereby be eligible to receive Holy Communion, there is a certain level of moral purity that is necessary.

- We must be in a state of grace. In other words, we should not be conscious of having any unconfessed grave sins on our souls. If we do, then we are not to receive Holy Communion until we are truly sorry for those sins and have confessed them to a priest.
- For either you or me to approach this altar in the state of mortal sin, without the necessary purity, is a very grave sin indeed, and it is a great offense to our Lord.
- The word *pure* means “authentic, simple, wholly itself, true.” The Hebrew word for purity, *emeth*, means truth. Being pure of heart means living with authenticity; it means living according to the truth.
- For us Catholics, purity of heart is not simply the absence of sin in our lives. It means that we’re striving to live our lives with integrity, seeking to integrate ourselves into Christ, Who is the way, the truth, and the life. It means practicing faith, hope, and charity.
- It means trying to live as our Lord counsels us to live through the teachings of the Church. It means trying to cultivate virtue and root our vice in our lives. It means doing our best to live a life of moral integrity and going to confession for those times when we fail.
- But more than just being pure when we come to worship the Lord, we must also be grateful. In fact, as our healed lepers show us today, worship is essentially an act of giving thanks.
- Our primary form of worship as Catholics is the Eucharist, the Mass. As we all know, the word *Eucharist* is derived from a Greek word meaning “thanksgiving.”
- We give thanks – especially as we come to Mass – because like Naaman the Syrian and the 10 Samaritan lepers, we were foreigners to God, in need of healing, and through the waters of baptism we have been given a remedy for our sin and made God’s very own children.
- What’s more, our gratitude must admit of no conditions. Our gratitude to God must be firm in good times and in bad – perhaps most especially in the hard times of life.
- Our readings show us that it’s important to thank God when He answers our prayers, but it’s even more important to thank Him when things don’t go the way we want them to.
- Truly, we cannot be grateful enough to God for all that He does for us. And if God does not answer a prayer for us as we wish, if He doesn’t alleviate a particular suffering, it’s because He wants us to bear that cross for a reason! It means He has something better in mind for us!
- In our 2nd reading today, St. Paul speaks of perseverance amidst suffering. He says: “If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we persevere, we shall also reign with Him.” And it’s true, we must persevere through our trials and remain faithful and grateful no matter what.
- Our faithfulness to God, our willingness to continue worshiping Him with gratitude and purity of heart, helps lead us to eternal life.
- So ask yourself: what troubles me more than anything else? What’s my cross?
- Sometimes God heals our infirmities and answers our prayers according to our wishes. When He does, we must thank Him generously and live with greater faith, hope, and charity.
- And when God doesn’t relieve our suffering or answer our prayers as we wish, we must thank Him all the more – for it means that He’s inviting us to enter more deeply into His own suffering and death. It means He wishes to bring forth a greater good from our cross.
- May we all prepare ourselves to worship God better through purity of life and by cultivating grateful hearts, and may we learn to trust God more deeply by generously embracing whatever crosses He gives.