

Too thick to drink and too thin to plow

Mark Twain is credited with the remark: *The Missouri River is too thick to drink and too thin the plow*. It could be nicknamed the “Big Muddy”.

Which makes me recall the days when almost every home in my boyhood city was heated by a coal furnace in its basement, complete with a coal bin, leading to ash days when the ash bins were placed on the sidewalks to be picked up by the city trash people. Then (and I remember seeing this) the trash wagons would line up on the city’s industrial piers to dump the ashes into the Delaware River.

The other river in town named the Schuylkill (pronounced Skookel) may have been exempt from such treatment but it was already thick with the coal dust coming down from the mines upstate. Indeed, both rivers had become open-air sewage systems to an ever growing metropolitan area.

So, turning our attention to the first reading for this Sunday, the Syrian general Naaman had the same opinion regarding Israel’s Jordan River. Its being narrow, it had become an open sewer to the populations bordering it – and appropriately it emptied into the Dead Sea!

Today’s account tells of Naaman’s coming down to the region of Israel to see the ninth century prophet Elisha - for Naaman had contracted leprosy and his Hebrew slave girl in Damascus told him of Elisha’s miraculous powers. In those days it would be like going to the Mayo Clinic for a state of the art cure.

Being a part of Syria’s upper crust, Naaman carried with him a letter of introduction from the king of Syria to the king of Israel announcing Naaman’s intention and asking his endorsement. The king of Israel was not pleased. *What’s going on here? Our erstwhile enemy Syria sending a general down here? Possibly on the pretense of seeking a cure, but setting us up for some incident? And then what? And even if that’s not true, what if no miracle happens? Will Syria belittle us? Will Syria be insulted? Could this escalate into a war?* (Sounds like the same Middle East of today!)

Anyway, Naaman did arrive at Elisha’s door and Elisha’s remedy was: *Go and wash seven times in the Jordan River and your flesh will heal*. And just as we might suppose, Naaman became angry. What did Elisha think? That Naaman was some used chariot salesman to be told to take an aspirin? *I expected some abracadabra and a long invocation of his God and the leprosy would go away. We have crystal clear rivers in Syria that are healthier than the Jordan!*

But his servants reasoned with him: *If the prophet told you to do something extraordinary, wouldn’t you do it – because it was worthy of your status in society? And what’s more extraordinary than to be told to go wash in the Jordan?* So Naaman went down and plunged into the Jordan – seven times – and *his flesh became again like the flesh of little child*.

Isn't that a great story? And it's all about you. When will you stop hesitating upon the shore of a life fluid with faith, hope and love – to be swept up and energized as if you were a new born infant (like: baptized), ready to go with the flow at last?