

Scripture Study

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle B



Opening prayer

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

(Ps 32:1-2, 5, 11)

1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1

Mark 1:40-45

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Jesus continues his ministry throughout the Galilee region where we left him at the end of last Sunday's Gospel reading (Mark 1:39). In the midst of his ministry of preaching and healing, a man afflicted with the degenerative skin disease of leprosy approaches him.
- To be a leper in ancient times was to be a societal outcast. Among the Jews, lepers (and those who came in contact with them) were considered to be ritually unclean, unable to participate in the religious life of the community. One lived in degrading living conditions, often banding with other lepers and depending on the pity of others for survival. To be afflicted with leprosy was considered a direct curse from God (2 Kings 5:1ff; 2 Chronicles 26:19-20; Numbers 12:1-15).
- Lepers were required to keep their distance from other people, instead calling out "Unclean! Unclean!" (Leviticus 13:45-46) in warning. If not, they ran the risk of being driven away or stoned. This leper, however, approaches Jesus and throws himself at his feet. Instead of being repelled, Jesus is "moved with pity"—one of the very few times in the Scriptures Jesus is described in this way. Jesus touches the man and heals him.
- After the man is made clean, Jesus orders him not to make known what Jesus has done for him. Instead, the man so enthusiastically spreads the good news, Jesus finds it impossible to remain in towns and villages, instead (like the leper) being forced to stay in deserted places where people nonetheless continue to flock to him.

Questions:

- Why is the leper unsure of Jesus' desire to help (see Leviticus 13)? What is significant about Jesus touching the leper prior to healing him? Was it always necessary for Jesus to touch someone to effect a cure (see Matthew 8:5-13; Mark 3:1-5; John 4:43-54)?
- Notice that Jesus' disciples are not mentioned in this scene? Where do you think they are?
- Why would Jesus say "See that you tell no one anything" (see verse 45)?
- The leper came to Jesus miserable and humble. Do you think we must admit sin and have a firm purpose of amendment to be forgiven? Why or why not?
- Who might the leper in this story represent? What might the disease of leprosy represent?
- Who is considered "unclean" in our society? Do you reach out and touch them? How?
- Where do you need Jesus' special touch this week? How can you touch others?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 1503-1505, 2616, 439

Closing prayer

This man prostrated himself on the ground, as a sign of humility and shame, to teach each of us to be ashamed of the stains of his life. But shame should not prevent us from confessing: the leper showed his wound and begged for healing. "If You will", he says, "You can make me clean"; that is, he recognized that the Lord had the power to cure him. ~St. Bede the Venerable

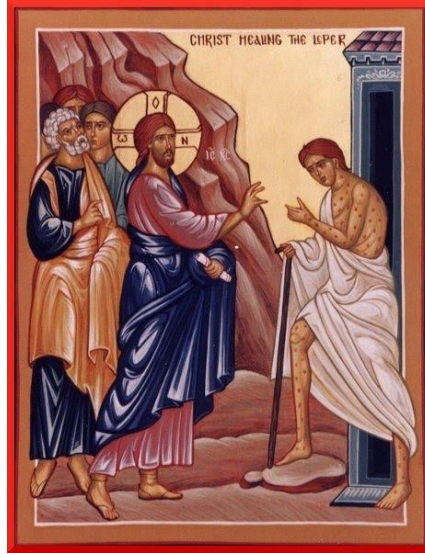
Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

"People came to Jesus from every quarter"

Scripture: *Mark 1:40-45*

And a leper came to him beseeching him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. And he sternly charged him, and sent him away at once, and said to him, "See that you say nothing to any one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to the people." But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

Meditation: Is there anything that holds you back from approaching the Lord Jesus with expectant faith and confidence – perhaps fear, pride, doubt, and the risk of losing your reputation or your friends? No one who sought Jesus out was refused his help. Even the untouchables and the outcasts of Jewish society found help in Jesus. Unlike the people of Jesus' time who fled at the sight of a leper, Jesus touched the leper who came to him and asked to be made clean. Why was this so remarkable? Lepers were treated as outcasts of society. Their physical condition was terrible as they slowly lost the use of their limbs and withered away with open sores over their entire bodies. They were not only shunned but regarded as "already dead" even by their relatives. The Jewish law forbade anyone from



touching or approaching a leper, lest ritual defilement occur.

The leper who came to Jesus did something quite remarkable. He approached Jesus confidently and humbly, expecting that Jesus could and would heal him and make him whole again. Normally a leper would be stoned or at least warded off if he tried to come near a rabbi. Jesus not only grants the man his request, but he demonstrates the personal love, compassion, and tenderness of God in his physical touch. The medical knowledge of his day would have regarded such contact as grave risk for incurring infection. Jesus met the man's misery with compassion and tender kindness. He communicated the love and mercy of God in a sign that spoke more eloquently than words. He touched the man and made him clean – not only physically but spiritually as well.

Some eleven centuries later, a man named Francis met a leper on the road as he journeyed towards Assisi:

“Though the leper caused him no small disgust and horror, he nonetheless, got off the horse and prepared to kiss the leper. But when the leper put out his hand as though to receive something, he received money along with a kiss” (from the *Life of St. Francis* by Thomas of Celano).

Francis did what seemed humanly impossible because he was filled with the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is ready to heal us and free us from fear, prejudice, and anything else that might hold us back from approaching others with selfless love and concern for their welfare. Paul the Apostle tells us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit sets us free to love as God loves – with mercy, kindness, goodness, and compassionate care. How do you treat your neighbor, especially those who have been rejected, mistreated, and left alone. Do you approach them with the same love and compassion which Christ has shown to you?

“May the power of your love, Lord Christ, fiery and sweet as honey, so absorb our hearts as to withdraw them from all that is under heaven. Grant that we may be ready to die for love of your love, as you died for love of our love.” (Prayer of Francis of Assisi, 13th century)

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