

Mark 1:40-45

A leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his knees: 'If you want to' he said 'you can cure me.' Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. 'Of course I want to!' he said. 'Be cured!' And the leprosy left him at once and he was cured. Jesus immediately sent him away and sternly ordered him, 'Mind you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest, and make the offering for your healing prescribed by Moses as evidence of your recovery.' The man went away, but then started talking about it freely and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived. Even so, people from all around would come to him.

There is a touching humility in the leper's request to Jesus, "If you want to, you can cure me." This appeal was met with compassion by Jesus, who was moved with pity. He went further, stretching out his hand and touching the leper, so making himself unclean according to the law.

Shortly afterwards Mark says that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but had to stay outside in country places. This compassion for suffering humanity resulted in more and more people coming to him, and even today the outstretched arms of God's Son on the cross are a never-ending invitation to sinners to seek refuge with him. No longer was the leper, when cured, forced to live apart from the community.

We all need to connect with others, to be in communion with them. We don't like to feel isolated or cut off from family, friends, or the wider community. One of the most challenging aspects of sickness or disability can be the isolation that it brings. When we are ill or our body grows weak, we cannot take the same initiative we used to take to connect with others. People can become housebound because of their physical condition; the things they used to do to meet up with others are no longer possible.

There are many isolated and lonely people among us. The scope is there for all of us to take the kind of step that Jesus took towards the leper. There are always people among us waiting to be touched by our compassionate presence. When they are, they can experience the same kind of transformation as the leper did in today's gospel.

Sixth Sunday

Year B

11th February 2024



Two of our readings at today's Mass refer to leprosy. The leper in the Gospel left civilization because of his illness. He had no choice but to leave his town or village and warn people of his condition if they came near him. When Moses' sister Miriam got leprosy, she is described by the Book of Numbers "as one dead," and she received her leprosy as a punishment for rebelling against Moses. As soon as the leper in the Gospel was diagnosed with his illness, it was as if he had died and we can imagine some would have wondered what sin he had committed. He could no longer live with his family. He could no longer worship in his local synagogue or go to the temple. But in the midst of this terrible pain and suffering he chose to approach Jesus. We are not sure how he heard about Jesus but he had faith in Jesus to help him. He made a decision to go to Jesus and that was the beginning of the turnaround in his life. Had he not gone to Jesus, he would have remained in his pitiable condition and continued to deteriorate. Going to Jesus changed everything in his life.

Opening Prayer

*O God, who teach us that you abide in hearts that are just and true,
grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace
as to become a dwelling pleasing to you.*

Leviticus 13:1-2,44-46

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'If a swelling or scab or shiny spot appears on a man's skin, a case of leprosy of the skin is to be suspected. The man must be taken to Aaron, the priest, or to one of the priests who are his sons.

'The man is leprous: he is unclean. The priest must declare him unclean; he is suffering from leprosy of the head. A man infected with leprosy must wear his clothing torn and his hair disordered; he must shield his upper lip and cry, "Unclean, unclean." As long as the disease lasts he must be unclean; and therefore he must live apart: he must live outside the camp.'

The ancient world used to combat physical leprosy by isolating the lepers, make them live outside the camp or town, and making them cry aloud, "Unclean, unclean!" as a warning to anyone approaching them. Also, whoever had the misfortune to even touch a leper would be regarded as unclean, and would be excluded from the community.

Leprosy is a good analogy for sin because it is a dreadful disease that causes separation from the community. However, sin is even more dreadful because it not just causes separation from the community but, even worse, it causes separation from God. However, it is not God or the community that pushes the sinner away; it is the sinner who does this to himself by his sin.

Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we experience the healing touch of our Saviour. We are lifted up whole again, we are forgiven and we are restored to a state of union with him and with our sisters and brothers in the Christian community.

Psalms 31(32):1-2,5,11

Happy the man whose offence is forgiven, whose sin is remitted.

O happy the man to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, in whose spirit is no guile.

But now I have acknowledged my sins; my guilt I did not hide.

I said: 'I will confess my offence to the Lord.'

And you, Lord, have forgiven the guilt of my sin.

Rejoice, rejoice in the Lord, exult, you just!

O come, ring out your joy, all you upright of heart.

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

Whatever you eat, whatever you drink, whatever you do at all, do it for the glory of God. Never do anything offensive to anyone – to Jews or Greeks or to the Church of God; just as I try to be helpful to everyone at all times, not anxious for my own advantage but for the advantage of everybody else, so that they may be saved. Take me for your model, as I take Christ.

We have been created for community and are called to live our faith in and with a community. Isolation is a contradiction to Christianity, which is why, particularly for those who are forced to isolate, the Coronavirus is an evil in many different ways. Every time when we celebrate the Eucharist we celebrate as a community. Paul said to the Corinthians, "We though many form one single body." (1 Cor 10:17) In community we are to make Christ real. Love is to be the characteristic of the Christian community. As Paul said, "if I give away everything but am without love, it will do me no good whatever." (1 Cor 13:3) Jesus said, "By this will all know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." (John 13:35). That is why Paul could say in our second reading today, "Take me for your model as I take Christ." (1 Cor 11:1) We are all called to reflect Christ. In the old Eucharistic Acclamation, we used to say, "When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory." That is also what Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:27). When we gather for the Eucharist it is to be an act of love, reflecting the love in the community, because everyone in the community is to reflect Christ.

Alleluia, alleluia!

*May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our mind,
so that we can see what hope his call holds for us.*

Alleluia!

(Gospel overleaf)

Prayer over the Offerings

*May this oblation, O Lord, we pray, cleanse and renew us
and may it become for those who do your will
the source of eternal reward.*