

Sixth Sunday Ordinary Time (B)

Leprosy. Just the word gives some people chills. The first reading we heard today from Leviticus is often cited as the biblical source of the perception that people with leprosy were unclean. Judeo-Christian belief, for some, held that leprosy was of moral consequence, and, as in many societies, [early Christians](#) believed that those affected by leprosy were being punished by God for sinful behavior.

People with leprosy, according to Leviticus, the Jewish book of Laws, were to sit or stand off alone and warn others that they were contagious...if they failed to warn others away from them...they could be executed.

Things haven't changed much over the years....one of the recommended practices today to avoid getting the flu is to stay away from sick people. If you are nervous about the flu...don't touch others at the kiss of peace...just nod and smile. Don't receive from the common cup of wine. Receive communion in the hand...not on the tongue. But thankfully we do not execute people who have the flu...we just avoid them.

Those with leprosy were thought to be highly contagious They really are notin fact the condition described as leprosy is not the disease as we define it today. More likely it described a skin condition like psoriasis or eczema. The chief priests would have declared someone stricken like that as impure...not perfect like God....so the person would have been cast out of contact with society.... ordered to separate from others...and constantly berate themselves....unclean....unclean.. as a warning to passers-by to cross the street.

So what was Jesus doing touching the man with leprosy who approached him? The act of touching itself probably took the breath away from His followers. First he is touching a fellow with a "condition" and second he is flying in the face of the Jewish hierarchy...again.....because it was that hierarchy that declared the man unclean to begin with.

Jesus cures the man out of pity for him.

Let's put ourselves in that fellow's place for a minute. Family meant everything to the people of Jesus' day. It should be that important for us too but that is a homily for another day. This unnamed person in Mark's gospel is ordered out of camp. He is not to associate with anyone until he is healed.....if and when that might happen. He is to have no verbal or physical contact with anyone....for a man who grew up in a culture of comradery and sharing this is devastating.

Ever been there? Have you ever found yourself pushed out of a group you enjoy or a family circle because of some misstatement or disagreement? It isn't a good place. Compound that if you were ostracized because of something completely out of your direct control...an illness, or infirmity, or disability,

"The leper came to Jesus and said, "if you wish, you can make me clean" and Jesus, moved with pity, stretched out his hand, touched him and said 'I will do it. Be made clean".

The leper had faith in the ability of the Galilean lay teacher to heal him. We don't know how long the man suffered with his exile. What bothers you and keeps you from fully participating in community? How long have you been estranged from family or a friend?

At Christmas we offered you a Matthew Kelly book entitled *Perfectly Yourself*. In one chapter Kelly writes about those “things” that keep him awake at night...the things that worry him. Kelly concludes worry is a self-deception. It is caused by events we have no control over.

The leper saw that...and saw in Jesus the opportunity to reach out to someone who could control the outcome.

For Lent, I recommend you shuffle through the piles at home and find this nice little book by Matthew Kelly and re-read it...or read it for the first time. Compliment your reading by subscribing, at no cost, to daily emails with short inspirational videos from DynamicCatholic. Visit our parish website for details.

Lent begins this Wednesday. The days of preparation for the agony Jesus suffered for us and the joy of his Resurrection from the dead are a perfect time for us to turn to Him and say “if you wish, you can make me clean”.

Give up some things for Lent if you wish...a self-denial of sorts. You can also do something positive for yourself like turning to the Lord who loves you and praying each day for healing. As the psalmist sang, “I turn you Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.”

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