

6th (SJ&QA) Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

What common instruction does Jesus give in most of his healing miracles? *'See that you tell no one.'* One way to assure the spread of a good rumor (or bad) is to instruct people not to tell anyone.

According to ancient Hebrew belief, diseases, illnesses, and death were manifestations of human beings' sinful condition. Lepers—because of their sordid physical state—were particularly looked upon as *'punished'* by God because of their sins or those of their ancestors. The Mosaic Law further reinforces the abhorrence to these afflicted individuals by declaring them *'unclean'* and unfit to participate in Israel's socio-religious life. The first reading presents to us the hard law, bearing on those who had blotches or sores of leprosy on their skins. The law, in Leviticus, prescribed that the priest diagnoses the disease and declares the person unclean and has the authority to declare a leper *'clean'* or *healed*.

While the law demands a leper should warn the people of their presence, the leper in today's Gospel made a bold attempt to reach out and approach Jesus. The leper did not directly ask Him for healing as a desperate person might do. Kneeling, he sincerely pleads with humility, *"If you wish, you can make me clean."* Here, human misery and divine compassion meet as Jesus is moved with pity. He approaches, touches and speaks to the leper and curing him says, *"I do will it, be made clean."* The leprosy left him immediately and he was made clean. Jesus

shows extraordinary compassion and the willingness to defy socially accepted behavior prohibiting lepers from making social contact with the rest of society and risking himself becoming ritually unclean. These three actions of Jesus define the uniqueness of His love. He does not just do good. His good deeds come from a compassionate heart—a heart that bleeds for human suffering and longs to make the sufferer whole. Jesus reveals to us the very heart of God. *Do you have the heart of Jesus?* While people could only see scabs and sores and want the tormented man out of their presence, God in Jesus, approaches him as if to touch his pain and share his torment. In that touching gesture extended to the outcast, Jesus establishes a model of behavior for all of us to emulate. Origen, one of the Church Fathers said, “*Jesus touches the leper in his untouchability to show us that we should despise no one, nor abhor and be disgusted by them.*”

The story of the cleansing of the leper encapsulates the beauty of *welcoming, healing and restoration*. In our society there are those who are considered social outcasts often rejected by people: the poor and marginalized, the convicts, and the physically impaired. *What is our attitude towards them and our Christian response?* As with Jesus, so with us, it is not only what we do that matters but what matters even more is the love and compassion with which we do it. By our encouragement, affirmation and support, we break down the divisions and segregation and heal the loneliness and brokenness in our

community. In doing so, we are following what Jesus did as He reached out and touched the untouchable.

In our Christian faith we cannot but be reminded of the power of Jesus that is now at work in the sacraments, the fountains of healing and life. In particular we think of the sacraments of reconciliation and the anointing of the sick, but also of the Eucharist. Through these sacraments grace flows to strengthen and heal us of our physical, psychological, and spiritual illnesses. Through these signs Jesus is once again moved by his burning love for us, touches us and makes us whole.

When you pray, do you express your total dependence on God? “If you wish you can make me clean” We often seek and expect this kind of healing—*fast and immediate*. But what we are wishing for is not healing but magic—to be able to walk again, to be cleared of illnesses, to be freed from poverty, to be relieved of conflicts, to be rid of problems. We want the Lord to do magic for us at the snap of His finger. *“Lord, give me patience and I want it now.”* Real healing does not happen thus. Sometimes we need to come to Jesus, kneel before him and beg him. St. Teresa of Calcutta said, *“I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us, and we change things.”* Look again at the leper’s actions and instead proclaim your own pains and illnesses. Some of us do not want to kneel and beg and pray. Others want things to be easy and comfortable, and they want it fast. No, God does not operate a relief center. God walks with us. God

wants us to run to him first. Like He is all we've got and not the comfort we used to know and want ourselves. St. Augustine urges us, *“Work as though everything depends on you and pray as though everything depends on God!”*

Our Gospel story is not so much about the healing as it is about Jesus' goodness and kindness. He wants the healed leper to tell no one about the healing. He wishes him instead to share the kindness and spread the goodness around. Just like the leper who began to publicize the Good News, St. Paul in our second reading exhorts all of us, *“Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God...” “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”* Amen.