

February 11, 2018

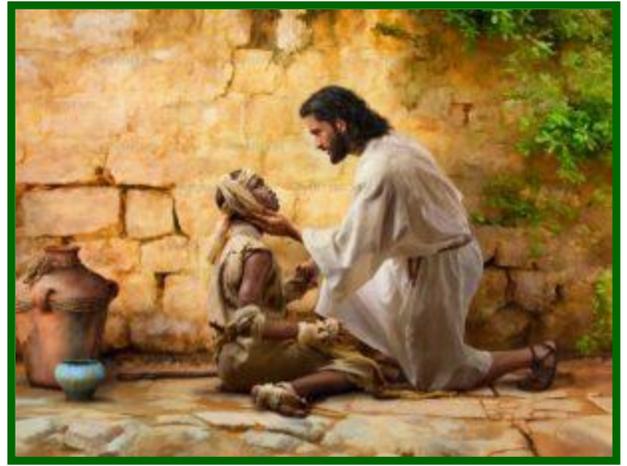
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mark 1:40-45

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46 (First Reading)

1 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 2 "If someone has on his skin a scab or pustule or blotch which appears to be the sore of leprosy, he shall be brought to Aaron, the priest, or to one of the priests among his descendants.

44 If the man is leprous and unclean, the priest shall declare him unclean by reason of the sore on his head. 45 "The one who bears the sore of leprosy shall keep his garments rent and his head bare, and shall muffle his beard; he shall cry out, 'Unclean, unclean!' 46 As long as the sore is on him he shall declare himself unclean, since he is in fact unclean. He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp.



Mark 1:40-45 (Gospel Reading)

40 A leper came to him (Jesus) and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean." 41 Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean." 42 The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. 43 Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once. 44 Then he said to him, "See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them." 45 The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

Background

The first reading from Leviticus is included this week, because it sheds light on the seriousness with which people dealt with the disease that is called leprosy in the culture of Jesus' time. Reading the entire thirteenth chapter of the book of Leviticus would give a fuller picture of the concern people had about leprosy. An infected person was removed from society because of the highly contagious nature of the condition. The priest would examine the person and determine the length of quarantine/exile. Before the person could rejoin the community, they needed to be examined by the priest and declared clean. People were exiled despite the fact that a person's survival was dependent upon maintaining family and social relationships. When appropriate, a funeral service was held for the person being permanently expelled.

Last week the gospel concluded with Jesus rejecting Peter's suggestion that they return to Capernaum where folks were gathering who wanted to see him. Instead, Jesus said, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come." (Mark 1:38) The last line of the text was "So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons through the whole of Galilee." (Mark 1:39) The gospel text for this Sunday follows. Jesus continues to demonstrate that he is more powerful than those evil spirits that were believed to be the cause of sickness.

The person described in the text has a skin condition that makes him both a social outcast and ritually unclean. By coming forward and presenting himself to Jesus, the man is disregarding the law that isolates those with his condition. Jesus is described in the text as being moved with pity. The verb in the Greek text would suggest moved with "deep inner groaning." By touching the man, Jesus himself becomes ritually unclean. Responding to the man is more important than maintaining his own ritual purity. The touch which renders Jesus unclean brings healing to the man. Because ritual cleanliness needs to be verified by a priest, Jesus sends the man to

the priest, with the warning not to tell anyone what has taken place. The text does not indicate that the man went to the priest, but instead he began to tell people what had taken place.

As a result, large numbers of people were seeking out Jesus. This suggests that they could readily observe that the man had been healed of his condition.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever been quarantined?
2. Have you ever known someone who was quarantined? How did that affect your relationship?
3. Do you have areas of your body that you consider more attractive? Are there other areas of your body that you try to keep covered or hidden?
4. What do you think it was like for this leper to have Jesus touch him?
5. The text says that Jesus was moved with pity when he encountered the leper. Are there times when you find that you too are moved with pity for others? Are there also times when you are not? Do you know what keeps you from being moved with pity?
6. The leper says to Jesus: "If you wish, you can make me clean." Have you ever spoken in a similar fashion to God? If yes, what do you recall now about that experience? If not, why not?
7. Can you take some time now to talk with God about your desire to be touched by God, about those around you who are in need of being touched or about some other thought or feeling that arises in you from this text?

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The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.

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