

February 14, 2021
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "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.

If the man is leprous and unclean, the priest shall declare him unclean by reason of the sore on his head. "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!' '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.

(Gospel) Mark 1:40-45

A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean." The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once. 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." 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 was referred to as leprosy in Jesus' era. It was such a concern that the entire thirteenth chapter of the book of Leviticus is an instruction of how to respond to a person who may be leprous.

Last week the gospel concluded with Jesus not following Peter's suggestion that they return to Capernaum, where people were gathering hoping to see Jesus and perhaps witness him curing the sick or casting out demons. 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 throughout 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 sicknesses.

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 leper 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 he is moved with "deep inner groaning." By touching the man, Jesus himself becomes ritually unclean. Responding to the man is more important to Jesus than maintaining his own ritual purity. The touch which renders Jesus unclean brings healing to the man. Ritual cleanliness needed to be verified by a priest, therefore 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, 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. What are some of the ways social distancing and isolation have affected you in the last year?
2. In what ways do people experience distancing and/or isolation because of their physical appearance?
3. Do you know people who hide parts of who they are in order to appear like everyone else?
4. 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 keep hidden?
5. What do you think it was like for this leper to have Jesus touch him?

6. The text says that Jesus was moved with pity when he encountered the leper. Are there times when you find that you too have been moved with pity for others? How did that experience affect you and the other person?
7. The leper says to Jesus: "If you wish, you can make me clean." Have you ever spoken in a similar fashion to God?
8. Can you talk to God about some area of your life that you would like to have God touch, or your struggle to be able to touch others in way that is healing?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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Excerpts from the readings for February 14, 2021, the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron,

"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.

If the man is leprous and unclean, the priest shall declare him unclean by reason of the sore on his head.

"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!'

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."

I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

Blessed is he whose fault is taken away, whose sin is covered.

Blessed the man to whom the Lord imputes not guilt, in whose spirit there is no guile.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I covered not.

I said, "I confess my faults to the Lord," and you took away the guilt of my sin.

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you just; exult, all you upright of heart.

Brothers and sisters, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

Avoid giving offense, whether to the Jews or Greeks or the church of God,

just as I try to please everyone in every way, not seeking my own benefit but that of the many,

that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean."

Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean."

The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him.

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."

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.

Excerpts from Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46; Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 11; 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1; and Mark 1:40-45