

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time 2021

My beloved brothers and sisters, until about 70 years ago, Leprosy was one of the most dreaded diseases in the world. Lepers were forced to live in leper colonies, apart from society, even apart from their loved ones. It would start as a small white patch, usually on the face, and then begin to form pustules. It spread all over the body, especially over the extremities, and was accompanied by the extremities rotting off of the body and the horrifying smell of rotting flesh. It was so horrifying, it was considered a visible punishment from God.

From Old Testament times, the Leper was forced to call out: “Unclean, Unclean, and to ring a bell,” warning people of the approach. They could not approach anyone closer than 100 yards, and to do so, would mean they would be stoned to death. To brush up against a leper, was to make oneself unclean, because it was believed that Leprosy was God’s visible punishment for sin. Thus, from the Old Testament forward, theologians conceived Leprosy as a symbol for sin and the alienation of sin, it destroyed the person, and their ability to relate to other people.

In this Gospel story, the leper comes to Jesus, merely doing so was an act of great and courage. When Jesus reaches out and touches him and heals him, He takes on his uncleanness upon Himself. Therefore, this is much more than a story about a miraculous healing. It is a story about the mission of Jesus, of why He came into the world, and the work He still does for us!

St. Mark tells us this story to remind us that Jesus is the Redeemer, and by this Miracle, shows us what this means: Jesus is the One who comes into this fallen, sin-infected world, and by the power of His mercy and grace, cleanses us and gives us a new start in life. He still does so through the Sacraments of Confession and the Anointing of the Sick! By this miracle, Jesus tells us that He has not come to condemn us, but to save us and set us free from sin and all of its effects and poisons!

However, Jesus, who sees into the human heart, also sternly warns the Leper, not to reveal the source of this healing, who promptly goes out and disobeys Him.

Perhaps, we are seeing a glimpse into the heart of this man. Perhaps, the thing that most needed to be healed has resisted healing: his disobedience. The Ancient Romans had a saying: *Nemo iudex in causa sua*. It means: no one can be a judge in his own cause. We can never forget that Jesus has also called us to a radical reform of our thinking and our attitudes about God, the world, ourselves and others. By this Gospel, Jesus is calling us to submit ourselves to obedience to Him, to the Church and to rightful authority as well. That usually raises the leprosy and the hackles of many today. That is why we see such disorder in our society, our leaders, and so many in the Church who have simply decided: I don't have to listen, and you're not the boss of me! Let us come now, to the only One who can heal this deepest leprosy of our lives!