

Homily for the 6th Sunday in ordinary Time - 2021

[Lv 13:1-2, 44-46](#); [1 Cor 10:31—11:1](#); [Mk 1:40-45](#)

“Christ enables us to serve one another”

Dearly Beloved, I believe one of the silent killers in our current time has been isolation. Within this period of the pandemic, people are being increasingly isolated from one another for obvious reasons. I have encountered I have known personally as strong, suddenly experience a tremendous decline with the condition of their health deteriorated. It is one thing, when everyone believes that isolation is for the common good, yet another when a person is forced into isolation because of sickness. You may have heard of family members and loved ones who in their last moments, had to experience such difficulty in isolation because of the corona-19 virus. Many have struggled and died alone in isolations from their loved ones as a result of the pandemic. I pray for all those who have had to experience that. I do not wish that on any family or individual. Undoubtedly some have been hit harder than others within this period.

If we can look at the negative effects of isolation as being bad in our time, it was even worse at the Old Testament times and at the time of Jesus for those who had the leprosy disease. Leprosy! Even today the very word “leprosy” has a harsh and intimidating sound to it. Today we have a treatment for leprosy, which was not so, both during the time of Leviticus and Jesus’ time. Because the causes of the disease were not known, a person was exiled from “healthy” human society and worse of all, they were made to fend for themselves. No one would ever want to be a leper, cut off from one’s own family and friends and spurned by everyone because of fear of contagion. Sadly, this position was backed by the law. And that is what the first reading from the book of Leviticus draws our attention to.

In the Scriptures, leprosy becomes a symbol of sin. We can even speak of the “leprosy of sin.” We can understand this also because sin is seen but why people sin is not so clear. There is something broken in our human nature and, as Saint Paul says, we sin even when we try not to sin.

The second reading is from the First Letter to the Corinthians. The strong teaching in this small excerpt is that we should try to avoid giving offense to others and should try to please everyone. Paul implores us: *“Take me as your model as I take Christ.”* This model is that of sacrifice and caring for others, drawing closer to people especially in their weakness, sickness, and ensuring that they do not feel rejected. It is a model that refuses racism, favoritism, segregation, and all forms of stigmatizing, or presenting the under-privileged and the innocent with ungodly, deceptive and seductive options. This is why Paul says: *“...I try to be helpful to everyone at all times, not anxious of my own advantage; but for the advantage of everybody else, so that they may be saved.”* This is exactly what Christ did and is still willing to do for us. He did not spare himself in order to deliver us from the leprosy of helplessness.

Christians are called to love everyone and to serve everyone and to put one’s own needs behind the needs of others. This could sound like a commandment just to be nice. Instead, Saint Paul thinks of it as a way to bring salvation to others. We are all missionaries and must think about how we can draw others to Christ Jesus. I am happy to note and acknowledge many people within our community who

spend time to care for their ailing spouses, family members and other vulnerable individuals in their communities. Please, I wish to encourage you to continue giving your time and resources as you despise yourselves, so to be able to be of service to others.

Jesus clearly demonstrates his unconditioned love and care, similar to what St. Paul is suggesting in today's gospel. The man with leprosy took the initiative, approaching Jesus and asked for healing. In doing so, the leper violated the religious customs of the day by approaching a person who was clean. His request to Jesus can be interpreted as a courageous and daring act. The confidence of the leper in Jesus' ability to heal him is evident in the words of his request. But his words can also be read as a challenge to Jesus, asking just how far Jesus was willing to extend himself in order to heal someone. While healing the man, Jesus touched him, which also violated established social norms. This is an important sign of the depth of Jesus' compassion for the man and an important statement about Jesus' interpretation of the Law of Moses.

Although Jesus touched the leper, he did not break completely with the Law of Moses. He instructed the man not to tell anyone about the cure and told him to present himself to the priests as prescribed by the Law of Moses. Even though Jesus asks the leper to be silent about this cure, the leper cannot keep his mouth shut. The leper proclaims to everyone that he has been cured by Jesus.

Sin is seen in the early Church as a form of moral leprosy. It does not only isolate us from the love of God, but also, His plan and purpose for us. We are therefore, invited by Jesus to become clean in baptism. The early Church had a huge struggle to come to understand how anyone baptized could return to sin. But sin is like leprosy and returns over and over until there is a complete cure. The cure for spiritual leprosy is faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus communicates the love and mercy of God in signs that speak more eloquently than words. This is what we must learn from Jesus today. How do we approach "the untouchables and outcasts," the sick, the weak, the poor, and those we find difficult to love in our society? Do we offer them mercy and help as Jesus did? There is no gain saying that in our world today many still suffer and die from the stigma we have placed on them because of their poverty, sickness, or weakness.

Finally, Beloved, each one of us manifest a helpless leprosy and, something more than this would have been found in our lives today if Jesus had not come to our aid. Most especially, it is good to know that there is a special willingness in Jesus to help us more. The Lord is always ready to show us his mercy and to free us from whatever makes us unclean. Let us continue to have faith and trust in his love.
