

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

It was Sunday morning. Mass was about to begin and the people were just standing around catching up on the neighborhood news, when all of a sudden, the devil appeared in the Church. The people run out of the Church screaming in fear, except for one man sitting down the back. He doesn't scream, he doesn't run out, he just sits there. The devil sees him, looks at him, then goes up to him and asks him, "Hey you, do you know who I am?" The man replies, "Yes, I know who you are, you are the devil." And the devil asks the man, "Aren't you afraid of me?" The man replies, "No, I'm not afraid of you." The devil asks him why he is not afraid of him, to which the man replies, "Because I have been married to your sister for thirty years."

Dear Friends,

This weekend we remember the World Day of The Sick as a commemoration of the feast of our Lady of Lourdes, which we don't celebrate because it is Sunday. Let us offer our prayers for those who suffer from any type of illness.

Today's readings help us to reflect about some dreaded diseases like leprosy and how to reach out.

The first reading brings instructions of how leprosy was treated in the community. Leprosy was dreaded in biblical times because of its highly contagious nature, which is why people with leprosy were ostracized from society. They were looked upon as similar to corpses. This disease or any other disease was looked at in the Old Testament times as opposed to God's covenantal commandments. Leprosy was considered as divine punishment. I would like you to remember that disease is not a punishment from God. God never punishes anyone that way. It is neither a punishment nor a curse.

I am reading the Gospel from a different Bible translation which I personally liked. "A man with leprosy came to Jesus and knelt down. He begged, "You have the power to make me well, if only you wanted to." Jesus felt sorry for the man. So, he put his hand on him and said, "I want to! Now you are well." At once the man's leprosy disappeared, and he was well. (Mark 1: 40-42).

There is a world of difference between the expressions – 'leper' and 'man with leprosy' or 'leprosy patient'. The word 'leper' talks of what the person is... By saying that someone IS a disease, instead of saying that he/she HAS a disease, we tend to see him or her as a lesser human being or, as in the case of leprosy, no human being at all. The term 'leprosy patient' talks of what the person has... a human person suffering from a disease. Jesus, by stretching out his hands, respects the human person.

There are a couple of things Jesus did in a special way in this healing. Mark's Gospel highlights different aspects of Jesus in each of his healings.

First, Jesus had great and unlimited compassion for that man who had the disease. He moved with pity and touched him. Touching the person is prohibited in that community. Mark notably mentions it in most of his healing. In today's world, there are a lot of people isolated in hospitals, homes, and other places. They are always looking for someone's visit and being in touch with them, which would bring a lot of healing. Another element of healing is the power of the word that Jesus used in healing. Our words can heal people. We all experienced during covid how we were isolated from the rest of the world, and how the words, and our touch, helped people survive from the disease and its effects.

My second point is to appreciate the confidence, courage, and faith the man had in Jesus. He came forward and begged Jesus and said, 'if you wish, make me clean'. We could see the deep faith the man had in Jesus. The man's courage went across the rules of the community because of his faith in Jesus.

It is noted why Jesus asked to have the person show themselves to the priest. It was the custom at the time, that after a cure takes place, it was the priest, not a medical person, who determined whether the person was clean or unclean. In those days, it was primarily religious and not medical. It held the signs of cultic unworthiness. It also made the connection between holiness and wellness.

I would like you to visit someone that needs a visit in your neighborhood, or at an assisted living, nursing home or hospital. It may be a medical condition, advanced age or someone that may be grieving the loss of a loved one, etc. You and I can heal people when we have a compassionate heart.

A paragraph from Pope Francis on World Day of the Sick 2024:

"Let us remember this central truth in life: we came into the world because someone welcomed us; we were made for love; and we are called to communion and fraternity. This aspect of our lives is what sustains us, above all at times of illness and vulnerability. It is also the first therapy that we must all adopt in order to heal the diseases of the society in which we live."