

Lectio Divina of the 6th Sunday in ordinary time- B



I will do it. Be made Clean

Opening Prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit- Amen

Heavenly Father, we praise and thank You for Your loving-kindness and great mercy by strengthening us and holding us in your grace. Although we were unworthy to approach Your glorious throne because of our sins, yet in Your mercy and grace, You stooped down to us and lifted us out of the Satan's bondage and seated us together with Christ and showered us with Your undeserved grace and favor. We praise and bless you, Lord, for the way that You have gifted each of us in a very special and precious way, enabling us by Your grace to make a unique contribution to realize your plans and purposes in the body of Christ as her members. Give us a heart of love and deep sensitivities towards our brothers and sisters in Christ. Use us as your sanctified vessels that we may not only pour out your mercy and love to other people but also encourage others to show the same mercy and forgiveness to their brothers and sisters in the body of Christ and in the wider world beyond. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

First Reading: A reading from the book of 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."

The word of the Lord /Thanks be to God

Commentary: The first reading gives us the background of the sad state of lepers in the Biblical times. The Book of Leviticus contains laws that teach the Israelites that they should always keep themselves in a

state of legal purity as a sign of their intimate union with the Lord. The first reading deals with very ancient rules and customs. It was the duty of the priests to decide whether a man was infected with leprosy and when/whether he was healed. Once the priest had examined a patient and declared him a leper, the afflicted person had to live in isolation, away from the dwelling-places of healthy people, in order to prevent the spread of the dreaded disease. In other words, victims of leprosy were segregated from the community on two counts: (1) fear of contagion and (2) fear of the ritualistic uncleanness which resulted from contact with the diseased. We could easily relate the ongoing Covid pandemic with the leprosy of the Biblical times in terms of current scenarios - Segregation from the community, living in Isolation for a period of time, mask in public places and being restored in the community once we are cleared by the doctors. Leprosy is often used in the Bible as an illustration of sin because sin is contagious and destructive and leads to separation.

Responsorial Psalm 32 - *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.

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

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.

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

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

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

Commentary: This is David's penitential psalm. David expresses the joy of forgiveness. God has forgiven him for the sins he had committed against Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam 11,12). God wants to forgive sinners. Forgiveness has always been part of his loving nature. He invites us to confess our sins to him in order to follow him more faithfully.

Second Reading: A reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians 10:31-11:1

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.

The word of the Lord /Thanks be to God

Commentary: Is my action glorifying God? How can I honor God through my actions? God's love must so permeate our motives that all we do will be for his glory. St. Paul's criterion for all his actions was not what he liked best, but what was best for those around him. In this age of 'me first', 'I, me, and myself' 'be number one or be with number one', St. Paul's statement is a good standard. If we follow the example of St. Paul to respond with sensitivity toward others who are different from us, rather than by passing judgment on them or by excluding them from our neighborhood and church, then we will be

pleasing the Lord in everything that we say and do. The glory of God is served when we serve one another and live in loving unity

Gospel Reading: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. 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. 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.

The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

Meditation: In the biblical times leprosy was considered to be a contagious disease. Lepers had twofold sufferings. They not only suffered the terrible physical pain in their limbs but also the terrible isolation from the rest of the community. They were forced to live in the tombs, outside of town. They had to ring a little bell and call out "Unclean, unclean," wherever they walked (Lev 13:15). If a person contracted leprosy, the priests who were responsible for the health of the camp, used to declare him a leper and banish him from his home and the city until their death. If they are cured, they have to go to the priest to be examined and give a thanksgiving offering to God at the temple. That is why Jesus wanted this man to give his story firsthand to the priest to prove that his leprosy was completely gone so that he could be restored to his community. According to Lev 14:3-7 3: The priest is to go outside the camp and examine them. If they have been healed of their defiling skin disease, the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the person to be cleansed. Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the defiling disease, and then pronounce them clean. After that, he is to release the live bird in the open fields. Two birds are used. One dies (a guilt bearing sacrifice- Jesus), and one lives (a living sacrifice- we). The leper, like the living bird, goes free. In today's Gospel, the evangelist Mark describes how the leper in his desperate need approached Jesus with gestures of humility (kneeling down) and faith, begging Jesus to heal him. Jesus reached out and touched him even though his skin was covered with dread disease.

Message for our Life from today's gospel reading:

Formation of leprosy in soul: We may not know the pain of the lepers as we don't have experience. We may not even have seen lepers in our neighborhood. But we could easily form leprosy in our mind. For example when we really dislike to look at someone because of his/her appearance or when we avoid some people's company for some social and ethnical reasons or when we openly exclude some in our social get together or when we go by the color of the skin instead of the content of the character, we develop leprosy in our mind, heart and soul.

Go by inside of a person and not outside: We must always remember that the real value of a person is inside, not outside. Although a person's body is diseased or deformed, the person's inside is valuable to God. No person is disgusting for God's touch. In a sense we are all people with leprosy because we have

all been deformed by the ugliness of sin. But God, sending down his son Jesus our Lord, has touched us and giving us an opportunity to be healed. And therefore we need to thank our Lord for wellness and wholeness. It is our bounden duty to pray for doctors, nurses, priests and nuns and other philanthropists who dedicate their life to take care of the lepers.

Associate with untouchables: The Mosaic law prohibited a Jew from touching a leper. If so, he would become ritually unclean but Jesus ignored the law in order to identify himself with the rejected person. Ironically Jesus became “unclean” himself as he stretched out his hand to the leper and touched him and made him whole. What really touched the leper was the touch of Jesus. Touch is the first sense we experience at our birth and indeed it is a very powerful sense. It is the secret weapon for successful relationship. It is a medium of communication. It is a language of love and affection without words. As humans, we need human touch with love and compassion. As Christians, we need the divine touch of Jesus with his healing power.

Our Response: Our Heavenly Father causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Mt 5:45). As His children, let us see godliness in everyone. Let us put on kindness and compassion because Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear, the blind can see and the mute can understand. Let us be kind and compassionate to everyone, especially to the ones who are marginalized socially, politically, racially and ethnically by the society.

Leper As a Missionary: The healed leper emerged as a missionary preacher. A totally isolated person on account of his illness instantly became a messenger of the good news in spite of Jesus’ order to present himself before the priest and receive the certificate of his healing. There is no indication that the healed man obeyed Jesus’ command to go to the priest. Rather, he began to proclaim energetically and to spread the word widely. The same thing happens when we show ourselves to the priest in the sacrament of penance. Like the leper we should rejoice in the Lord and spread the good news of His mercy, forgiveness and compassion. We should testify to our healing by living changed lives.

“The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty – it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality.” – St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Concluding Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father, and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him. Show us your face and we will be saved. Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money; made Peter weep after his betrayal, and assured Paradise to the repentant thief. You are the visible face of the invisible Father who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy. You were kind and compassionate to anyone who came to you in your life and ministry. Bless us that we may show feel and show compassion for those in ignorance and error: May this special year of St. Joseph be a year of grace from your Loving Father and your Church. May we, with renewed enthusiasm, bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind. We ask this through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy, St. Joseph, your beloved and tender Father on earth. Hail Mary / Priestly blessing