

6th Sunday – B

February 11, 2024

Pastor's Corner: Some news is just too good to conceal! The leper cured in today's gospel could not remain silent, and humanly speaking – especially when we consider the unusual circumstances of his healing – it is quite understandable. Jesus' desire to keep his identity hidden from public view is part of Mark's plan, as Jesus repeatedly calls for silence in the face of his miraculous activity.

It is one thing to suffer a painful illness and another to have a stigma attached to it. In today's world, there are many illnesses that plague humanity. From debilitating diagnoses such as ALS, Dementia, Alzheimer's, and illnesses that affect our mental stability. Not only are there medical ramifications to these illnesses, but there are also social stigmas attached as well.

So too with the leper of biblical times. People who contracted leprosy were seen as contagious and had to live apart for both hygienic and religious reasons. Wholeness and integrity were strong religious values in Israel. Anything defiled was considered unworthy of God or his people. The leper, therefore, lived apart and did not come into physical contact with others – even members of his/her immediate family.

Again, Jesus breaks with convention. He touches the diseased person and heals the illness. This arises from a simple request, couched in recognition of Christ's exceptional power. Jesus realizes what the person is enduring and does not hesitate to act.

Mark is telling us that each hearer of the gospel experiences Jesus' compassion and desire to heal us. What he said to the leper is offered to a sinful world and to each of us as well. At this Eucharist we are like the beggar who says to Jesus, "If you wish, you can make [us] clean." We can hear how our worship today applies the gospel story to us and our world. Listen to how many times the words mercy, cleansing, forgiveness, grace, salvation, healing, etc. are said throughout our service. For example, today's prayer over the gifts says, "Lord we make this offering in obedience to your word. May it cleanse and renew us and lead us to our eternal reward. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord."

There it is – we reach out to God through Jesus and ask to be cleansed. Jesus' quick and willing response to the leper is our reassurance that, once again, he says to us, "I do will it. Be made clean." But the leprosy of sin isn't just a personal affair; its effects shatter the people and nations of the world. Unfortunately, it is too easy to find evidence of this. Unfortunately, bad news from around the world comes rapidly to our cellphones as we do our daily chores. As I write this the war in Ukraine grinds on; Israeli drones have destroyed a hospital in Gaza; Hamas videos from its fighters show civilians, being massacred... and on and on. There is just not enough space to list the evidence of sin and its effects on our world's people. Will we ever be able to come together as a community, or will our leprosy keep driving us apart, constructing walls and causing us to settle our differences with might? People who get seriously ill, or are infirmed for a long time, say they feel cut off from the community – the fate of lepers. Society tends to forget these members easily and moves on to other preoccupying concerns. But in our church community we don't forget our infirmed and isolated sisters and brothers. We have volunteers who take the Eucharist to the homebound, those in nursing homes and prisons. These ministers represent us and, through them, Jesus once again reminds them that they are still part of our us. And who are we? We are a community of people always in need of cleansing; always stretching out our hands saying to Jesus, "If you want, you can make us clean." And he responds quickly and with compassion, as he did for the leper and continues to do for us, "Of course I want to, be clean."

What's Next? The past two weekends have given the Parish of St. Vincent de Paul some unexpected and perhaps unsettling news. The news of my impending retirement (effective April 2) and the news of the linkage of St. Vincent de Paul Parish to the Parishes of St. Ann and St. John Neumann. Where do we go from here? The next steps that will take place are the following:

- ❖ The priests of the Diocese of Scranton will be notified of the impending linkage of the 3 parishes. with a description of each parish, and all active priests will be given the opportunity to apply to become the Pastor of this new linkage. Usually a week or two is given so that any interested priests may apply for the position of Pastor of the linkage. After those who are interested submit their applications, the Priest's Personnel Board of the Diocese will consider those interested and make a recommendation to Bishop Bambera, who in turn will make the assignment.
- ❖ During this time of preparation for the linkage to become a reality, a Transition Team from each of the parishes will be formed and will meet with pastors and the Parish Life Planning Team from the Diocese of Scranton, to determine how this linkage will take shape.

During this time of preparation and adjustment, I would ask that everyone keep us all in prayer that the Holy Spirit will guide any planning and decision making that will take place. Obviously, this is a great challenge for all of us, but I know that St. Vincent de Paul Parish has NEVER failed in any challenges presented it. I trust that this will continue to be the case.

Ash Wednesday & Beginning of Lent: Wednesday of this week begins our Lenten Observance. Masses & the Imposition of Ashes will take place at: 9:00 A.M. and 7:00 P.M. Even though February 14, is also Valentine's Day, it is a day of Fast and Abstinence. - *On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, fasting rules allow Catholics to eat only one full meal and two smaller meals which, combined, would not equal a single normal meal. Additionally, Catholics may not eat meat on these two days—or on any Friday during Lent. The Fasting and Abstinence Guidelines apply to adults (in relatively good health) 18 – 59 years of age. Those young people 14 years and older are bound by the guidelines of abstinence – meaning no meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday – or any Friday during Lent.*

Stations of the Cross: The Lenten devotion – The Stations of the Cross will be prayed on the Fridays of Lent at 7:00 P.M. All are invited to join in this meditation on Jesus' journey to Calvary.

Living The Eucharist – Parish Lenten Program:

Living the Eucharist is a dynamic, parish-based program designed to help revitalize parish life and mission through a more profound experience of Sunday Mass. It helps the entire parish grow in their Catholic faith and live more fully as missionary disciples of Jesus.

Pope Benedict XVI's apostolic exhortation, The Sacrament of Charity, inspired Living the Eucharist. This exhortation calls on all Catholics to renew our experience of the Sacrament of the Eucharist as a mystery to be believed, a mystery to be celebrated, and a mystery to be lived.

Living the Eucharist renews and heightens parishioner involvement in the Sunday Eucharist, helps parishioners connect the celebration of the Eucharist more closely with the mission of Jesus Christ and the Church, and inspires them to live more intentionally as missionary disciples of Jesus during the week.

If you are interested in participating in this valuable experience, please call the Parish Office and register.