***Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time***

***World Marriage Day and World Day of the Sick***

\*\*\*Today’s Scripture lessons are appropriate for both of the celebrations we recognize on this weekend: World Marriage Day and World Day of the Sick.

-Both occasions provide an opportunity to reflect on the forgiveness and compassion of God who stretches out his hand to heal our wounds when we approach Him with confidence.

-Marriage and sexuality are gifts that often need redemption and healing. And who among us does not have someone who is sick, suffering or dying in our families who need the healing touch of Jesus?

-The readings teach us that the sick and the maimed are not to be objects of scorn, but potential reservoirs of God's mercy for us.

-St. Francis of Assisi, for instance, understood this.  When during his lifetime in the 12th and 13th centuries, leprosy was feared and avoided at all costs.

-And St. Francis, had a terrible fear of lepers.  Then one day when he was out for a walk, he heard the warning bell that lepers were required to ring in the Middle Ages.

-When all of a sudden a leper emerged from a clump of trees, St. Francis saw that he was horribly disfigured.  Half of his nose had been eaten away; his hands were stubs without fingers and his lips were oozing white pus.

-Instead of giving in to his fears, Francis ran forward, embraced the leper and kissed him.  Francis’ life was never the same after that episode.  He had found a new relationship with God; and the very presence of Jesus in the leper. He had a new sensitivity towards others and a new energy for his ministry. It transformed him forever.

-The wound of leprosy kept the leper isolated from society. Just as it did in the Gospel we hear today. But Jesus broke open the lepers isolation and freed him from his woundedness by touching him.

-Sometimes the wounds in our lives or the lives of others may keep us away from the Church or from our neighbors. Giving us the feeling of living alone or in a silo.

-Perhaps, it is a marriage that is suffering or situation where someone is afraid to return to church because of divorce or separation or remarriage.

-Have I reached out to someone who is suffering from the fallout of a divorce, or domestic abuse, violence, infertility or miscarriage?

-As Pope Francis has asserted: “Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God’s saving love, that is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings.”

-He also states: “We cannot forget that mercy is not only the working of the Father; it becomes a criterion for knowing who his true children are. We are called to show mercy because mercy was first shown to us.”

-We need to trust in the mercy of a forgiving God who assures us that our sins are forgiven and that we are clean.

**-**We are forgiven and made spiritually clean from the spiritual leprosy of sins when we repent of our sins because God is a God of love Who waits patiently for us.

-The only condition required of us is that we ask for forgiveness with a repentant heart.  We are sure to hear His words of absolution, *"Very well-- your sins are forgiven, and you are clean,*" echoed in the Sacrament of Reconciliation*.*

-We need to tear down the walls that separate us from others and build bridges of loving relationships.

-Jesus calls every one of us to demolish the walls that separate us from each other and to welcome the outcasts and the untouchables of society.

These include AIDS victims,  alcoholics, drug addicts and marginalized groups: the divorced, the unmarried-single mothers, migrant workers and the mentally ill.

God's loving hand must reach out to them through us.   Jesus wants us to touch their lives.   May we re-examine the barriers we have created and approach God with a heart that is ready to welcome the outcasts and exiles in our society.

-In 1996 I had the opportunity along with some chaperones, Mary Clark who was one of our parishioners who joined me, to take 12 young people to Haiti to our Diocesan Mission House for a 10 day mission experience in one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.

-While there, I recall going to an Aids Clinic for children. Here, children were dropped off each day to die with dignity with Mother Teresa’s Sisters caring for them. Many never seeing or hearing from their parents again.

-As missionaries we were called to observe and experience the ministry in each of these clinics through those who were serving there. We had the option to hold children who were dying in cribs and were scattered throughout a couple of large rooms.

-I honestly, was first hesitant, but after I saw their faces and one in particular who reached out to me to hold her, I in turn melted and lifted this beautiful child who had only months, weeks, or days to live.

-I embraced her and held her close to the side of my neck and comforted her the best I knew how.

-I will never forget those moments of the presence of God and His love as I held her in my arms.

-When I returned to the U.S., what I didn’t know was I ended up fighting a very viral case of ring worm for a full year on the side of my neck from that embrace. Nonetheless, It was worth it, as a reminder to me of the woundedness of others that we quickly forget. A child of God, who needed to be held and not forgotten. To die with dignity and love in the midst of suffering.

-May we too not pass up the opportunity to be the one who reaches out as Jesus did or as St. Francis did, to bear the suffering of only one who needed to be invited, accepted and loved.