

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 11, 2018

When we first read today's readings, the message of the Gospel seemed pretty straight forward. The leper asked Jesus to make him clean and Jesus responded by healing him. It may be enough to understand that all we need to do is ask and Jesus will answer, but deeper meanings come through as we review the readings again.

The entire group of readings raises thoughts about sin and how it may separate us from society, the community and family. Leviticus gives us the "why" of the leper's situation. He is unclean because of a sore on his head. When we looked up the leprosy of the Old Testament, we discovered that it was "seen as a form of physical and spiritual pollution which requires one to be excluded from the community". The law is very clear that a leper must stay away from others and live outside his camp. He is excluded, isolated, and alone. A parallel for today might be the poor, the misfits, the troubled people we encounter in the streets and in the hospitals. Should we even include ourselves when we are spiritually "polluted" and feel alone and isolated from God?

But, there is hope in the Responsorial Psalm. "I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble and you fill me with the joy of salvation." The psalmist writes that when we acknowledge our sin to God, He takes away our guilt and we can rejoice!

In the Gospel reading, the message of reconciliation is even more clear: Jesus is moved by pity for the leper, touches him, and immediately the man is made clean. He is no longer isolated – he is accepted back in his community. No questions asked! The man had the courage and absolute confidence of faith not to ask, but to make the statement "If you wish, you can make me clean." He recognizes that Jesus has power and yields to him without question. Do we approach Jesus with the same confidence and strength of faith in our prayers for healing and forgiveness? Do we submit in the same way, acknowledging Jesus's power and trusting in His goodness and mercy? Jesus's answer, "I do will it. Be made clean," provides the assurance that our prayers will be heard and accepted.

How then, can we see ourselves as forgiven, cleansed and healed? What can we do to thank God? Paul gives us direction on how we, as Jesus's disciples, can put the Gospel reading to work in our daily lives. He tells the Corinthians to do everything for the glory of God and to be imitators of Christ. Can we challenge ourselves to serve the outcasts of today's society? Can we be imitators of Christ by bringing the Good News to them? Are we able to touch the untouchables through acts of love?

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