**Homily, 6th Sunday in Ordinary time; Year B**

**A young man met with a car accident, and he woke up at the hospital with his left arm gone. He was so depressed that he decided to commit suicide. He went up the rooftop of the hospital. He was about to jump to his death when he saw on the ground a man dancing wildly. He noticed that the man had no arms.**

**This sight brought him back to his right senses. He went down the building and talked to the man. “I am ashamed of myself,” he said. “I lost one arm, and I was already thinking of committing suicide. But here you are. You have lost both arms, and you are still happy.” The man replied, “What made you think I am happy?” “Well,” the first guy said, “I saw you dancing.” “But I was not dancing,” the armless man said. “My back is itchy and I have no way of scratching it.”**

**Leprosy is not only itchy. It is a dreaded disease, which, at the time of Jesus had no known cure. The leper was the most miserable outcast in Jewish society. He had to live away from the community. Anyone who touched him would also be unclean. Hence, still alive, he was practically considered dead.**

**In the Gospel today, Jesus once again showed his compassion and power as the Divine Healer. He said to the leper, “I do will it. Be made clean.” And he was healed. But before saying those words, Jesus did something unusual and even unthinkable: “Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand (and) touched him” (Mk 1:41). In the sight of the Jewish leaders, it**

**was such a horrible thing to do. Jesus could be declared unclean and more importantly, he could be accused of violating the Law. But he did not mind. He was more concerned with obedience to the true spirit of the law.**

**His action imparts several important lessons for us. First, this was an expression of his overwhelming desire to reach out to people, especially those who are in need, the sick, the sinners and the outcasts. “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” (Mk 2:17). That has always been his mission in accordance with the Mystery of the Incarnation. God became man so that He can touch us and be one with us, especially in our miseries and sufferings. With this touch of Jesus, the leper was healed and can now go back to his family and community. The healing touch of Jesus gave him new life.**

**Second, Jesus touched the leper to impart healing in a personal way. God deals with each of us on a person-to-person basis. There is nothing impersonal with God. Jesus did this because, behind the horrible disfigurement of leprosy, he saw the priceless value of every human person.**

**Third, Jesus wanted to correct the common belief that sickness is a divine punishment for sins. By touching the leper, Jesus has shown that God is not a vengeful despot, but a loving and merciful Father. Sickness, no**

**matter how contagious and horrible, is not God’s punishment. It is just the result of the frailty and limitations of the human body. And in fact, in Jesus, God has always shown genuine compassion for the sick and the afflicted.**

**But most importantly, the action of Jesus in touching the leper is a serious challenge to all his followers. At the Last Supper, he washed the feet of his apostles and said: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn 13:15). With his action, he is instructing us to reach out to everyone, especially the lost, the last and the least in society.**

**One day, a group of tourists visited the convent of the sisters of Mother Teresa in Calcutta. They were horrified at the appalling condition of the poor and destitute patients being cared for by the sisters. One tourist, seeing a nun cleaning the putrid sores of a patient, remarked with much disgust, “Sister, even if somebody pays me a million dollars, I will not do what you are doing right now.” The nun replied, “And neither will I. I am doing this only for the love of Jesus.” That is what every Christian should do: reach out, care and share – all for the love of Jesus. Failure to do so is definitely a grave sin – sin of omission. Like leprosy, sin defiles and deforms our soul, and it separates us from God and from others. And basically, sin is rooted in selfishness. Selfishness is crossing our arms, unmindful of the needs of others, unwilling to stretch our hands – indeed, the cause of too much misery and pain in the world.**