

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

February 14, 2021 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Good and gracious God, thank you for enabling us to gather together to listen to your holy Word and to share life and fellowship. May your Holy Spirit show each of us the message you want us to hear today. Cleanse our hearts of all that would prevent us from hearing your Word and acting on it. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: There is a strong contrast between the First Reading in which lepers must declare themselves "unclean" and the Gospel in which Jesus declares a leper "clean." In the Second Reading, Paul encourages the Corinthians to do all for the glory of God and to protect their unity.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

In Old Testament times, leprosy is a term used to describe a variety of chronic skin diseases. When the priest determines that one has a contagious disease, the person is declared "unclean" and banished from the community. If someone unknowingly approaches the leper, he/she must shout "Unclean! Unclean!" for such *contact* renders the "clean" person "unclean." If a leper is cured, he must go to the priest to undergo purification before he can be readmitted to the community. Because there is widespread belief that leprosy is brought on by sin, lepers are not only physically loathsome and socially dangerous, but are also viewed as morally reprehensible.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 32

This is one of the seven "penitential psalms" in the Psalter. It is a prayer of thanksgiving for the removal of sins.

SECOND READING: 1Corinthians 10:31-11:1

This reading concludes Paul's teaching on whether it is lawful for Christians to eat food of the meat of animals that had been offered to idols in pagan sacrifices.

Paul sees no problem in eating such food since Christians do not believe in idols. Therefore, the food is not unclean. However, Paul is exhorting the stronger members of this community to be sensitive to the weaker members (or less formed members) to abstain from such food if it might cause a scandal to new members who may still believe that eating such food is a form of idolatry. Paul is encouraging the more formed members of the community to sacrifice some of their freedom for the glory of God. "*Whatever you do ... do for the glory of God.*"

When Paul says he seeks "*to please everyone in every way,*" he does not mean that he is giving up his principles in order to be a 'crowd pleaser,' but rather sacrificing his freedom in order to make the Gospel attractive to those he is seeking to evangelize.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Mark 1:40-45

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 1:40-45

Although excluded from the community, lepers are allowed to attend synagogue, but they sit behind a protected screen, never daring to come into the main part of the synagogue. While we do not know the exact location of today's event, perhaps it occurs during a synagogue service. Recognizing Jesus to be a holy man, the leper may have done the unthinkable: he rushes from behind the screen and approaches Jesus. He believes Jesus *can* heal him, but he was not sure if Jesus will *want* to heal him. "*If you wish, make me clean.*" Then Jesus does the unthinkable, he stretches out his hand and *touches* the *untouchable*, thereby incurring ritual uncleanness. Jesus tells the rejected man: "*Of course I want to heal you. Be made clean.*" Jesus' touch heals the man not only on a *physical* level but also on a *social* and *spiritual* level. He no longer feels rejected by the community or by God.

We notice again a reference to the *messianic secret* (explained in last week's commentary). The leper is told not to tell anyone about his healing – but how does one contain wonderful good news? So he runs off and tells everyone. The man is told to go to the priest so he can get a certificate declaring himself clean, enabling him to once again mix with the community and worship with them.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. I assume all of us have seen the connection between leprosy and Covid-19, which are both very contagious diseases. People are fearful of them. These diseases force people to isolate from the community. For you, what has been the worst part of this Covid-19 pandemic? What helped you or continues to help you during this distressing time?
3. Who are the marginalized and 'untouchables' in our society? What can help us deal with these brothers and sisters as Jesus would?
4. Who might be people who may feel unwanted in our parish today? Why? What can be done to overcome this barrier?
5. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, despite my many faults and failings, you are always ready to welcome me. May I show the same hospitality to those I may tend to exclude.*

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week's readings. Suggestions: Think of someone who feels isolated or somewhat excluded. See what you can do to heal that person's sense of isolation.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Especially pray for all who suffer from skin diseases. Pray for those researching a cure. Pray for all who feel excommunicated from society and Church today, e.g., pedophiles.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

*God of all people,
remind us that your love knows no boundaries.
You love the outcasts and the oppressed
with a love that is fierce
in its protection and grace.*

*When our lives get too comfortable,
nudge us into going beyond
our own boundaries,
bringing outsiders into the warmth
of our communities.*

*This we pray through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.*