

6th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – B; Feb. 11th 2024
Leviticus 13: 1-2, 44-46; 1Corinthians 10:31-11:1; Mark 1:40-45

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

The ancient people always considered the deadly diseases and natural calamities as God's punishment for people's sins. The people of Israel were not an exception to this belief. The deadly disease like leprosy was the clear sign of one's grave sins and God's wrath. As leprosy was contagious in most cases, the affected person was cast out of the community to live in isolation. So the pain of the leper was more mental than physical. We have just heard in the Book of Leviticus how seriously the religious leaders considered the deadly disease of leprosy and how harshly lepers were treated.

For the past three consecutive weekends we have been listening to the first chapter of Mark which describes the eventful Galilean ministry of Jesus. Today Mark concludes the same chapter with Jesus' controversial healing of a leper. Mark gives only one such miracle whereas Luke, besides repeating the same miracle in chapter 5, also gives the account of the healing of 10 lepers in chapter 17:11ff. As you have listened to the reading, perhaps, you have noticed the human emotion of Jesus. Mark presents Jesus to be more human than divine. ***In Mark Jesus is emotional; at times, angry, critical and impatient.*** For example, in today's gospel Mark says that seeing the sad fate of the leper **Jesus was moved with pity or compassion.** Though Matthew and Luke narrate the same incident, they don't say that Jesus was moved with pity. In Mark every person can identify himself/herself with Jesus; he seems to be one like us.

To avoid public contact, the lepers were supposed to stay 50 yards away from the ordinary people. In case, he happened to be close to anyone, he had to cry out 'unclean, unclean' so that the public may move from the area. But Mark says that the leper came very close to Jesus and knelt before him. It means that he broke the law literally. Perhaps, Jesus shocked the crowd more by touching the leper. Anyone who happened to touch a leper would be ritually unclean and he should remain outside of the community for seven days. But the compassion of Jesus saw only the sad fate of that leper.

We have couple lessons to learn from this leper who broke the barrier of Mosaic Law and came to Jesus. First of all, the faith of the leper in Jesus' healing power is amazing. He believed that Jesus could heal him. Secondly he knew that he could not demand a healing from Jesus as he was labeled to be a big sinner. That is why, considering his unworthiness, he humbly knelt down before Jesus and begged, **"If you wish, you can make me clean."** In other words he was ready to accept the positive or negative answer of Jesus. **Mark says, 'Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand,**

touched him and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean.” It is the clear example of the compassionate love of Jesus.

In the modern age, thanks to the development of medical science the leprosy is almost eradicated from the world. Even if somebody is affected by it there is very effective treatment for that. Unfortunately, the worst leprosy of the age is the evil in human beings. They appear in different forms and different degrees. No advanced medical science can cure this leprosy; the physicians are helpless before it. Only Jesus Christ can cure this leprosy in totally free of charge. What we need is the simple procedure of true repentance and a good confession. Jesus is willing to wipe out any gravest sins in us. But we need the attitude and the humility of the prodigal son who knelt down before his father and confessed, **“Father, I have sinned against heaven and you; I no longer deserve to be called your son” (Lk 15:21)**. We notice that the father neither criticized him nor asked any questions; rather he was busy in arranging a big party. This is really the attitude of Jesus to a repentant sinner. The Lord says to Prophet Isaiah in chapter 1:18, **“Come now, let us set things right, says the Lord; though your sins be like scarlet they may become white as snow; Though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool.”** It is sad that many don’t have the humility to approach Jesus for a healing.

When a person commits sins or does anything evil, he/she isolates oneself from the society and God. But God can bring that person back and make him/her whole once again. This is the last Sunday before the beginning of the Lent. Let us examine and see, if we have any stain of sins let us approach Jesus in the confessional and purify ourselves and start anew. Jesus says in Luke, **“I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.” (Lk 15:7)**. But let us approach the Lord with the same humility of the leper, “If you wish, you can make me clean.”