

Readings Leviticus 13: 1-2, 44-46; Corinthians 10: 31- 11: 1; Mark 1: 40-45



Fr Michael says:

Curing the Leper

Jesus breaks through all sorts of taboos, in His relationship with lepers, they were excluded from Society, and they had to live on the fringes, having no contact with others, except their own kind! We have a model of how we, as Church should reach out to those whom Society excludes, as we are called to recognise on our own renewal and new life in Baptism and our call to spread the Good News! Paul confirms this message in his letter to the Corinthians. Despite His reaching out to lepers, Jesus wants to remain hidden till after His Death and Resurrection

Little gestures can give quite an insight into who people are; big things show their power! Little things show a person's humanity; we see in the touch of Jesus, small on one level, but vast on another – it affirms the dignity and value of such people. We need to see leprosy through the eyes of the people then, when it was feared greatly, possibly like AIDS for us today. Lepers were social and religious outcasts and so God was seen to have the same reactions!

Jesus allowed the leper to approach, touched him and cured him: He did what the Law forbade! We see in this attitude Jesus' great compassion for the outcast, the sinner and sufferer. The touch conveys the idea that all things are clean, external uncleanness does not touch the heart. He touched the leper, so that we should not despise anyone, or to regard them as pitiable because of what had happened to them. He touched the infirmities of others to send them away. So this simple gesture would have meant the world to the leper, as it is not so much the leprosy that bothers him, but the pain of being isolated from the community and people. That touch was a welcome and renewed his sense of worth and restored his human dignity. Oscar Wilde puts it like this: "Jesus understood the leprosy of the leper, the darkness of the blind, the fierce misery of those who live for pleasure, the strange poverty of the rich, the thirst that can lead people to drink from muddy waters."

Jesus challenges us to see how compassionate we can be; what is our idea of love – our capacity is often underused! We could do so many things to help but do not: can we rekindle the zest for living, give back hope – to reach out to our divorced and remarried people to make them feel at home with us, after all the pain and anguish that they have undergone: can we deprive of the Eucharist those who need the Lord's healing, He who sat and ate with sinners and wayward people – THE sign of welcome and hospitality. It is not a reward for the virtuous; it is the remedy we need for coming to new life and healing!

We are not usually good at being tactile; Jesus was immersed in people and who and what they are. We even avoid eye contact with those who are less fortunate than ourselves, we keep our distance: doing the exact opposite of what Jesus would do! Physical contact is precisely what gives people, especially the sick and wounded, a sense of warmth and joy. By that very act we show that we accept that person exactly as he or she is. "Lord, give us a warm heart and kind hands!"



Fr Tom says:

As I was growing up, there would be queues for the confessional each week before Sunday mass. Today you would have to go to the Cathedral to find the queues of yesteryear. Today, people ask if we have lost the sense of sin! This week's readings offer an opportunity for us to reflect on the effects of sin on us and understand more deeply the sacrifice Jesus made to set us free from it.

Jesus cures the Leper because he wants to and because he wants the Leper to be received back into full communion with the community and with God. But, in Jesus day, the Leper was excluded, expelled, isolated, set apart from the community and therefore from the essence of life. Isn't this precisely the consequence of sin? Sin isolates, it excludes, it creates a sense of aloneness and it cuts us off from the essence of life itself. In real life, leprosy gradually leads to a disintegration of the body and this too is the consequence of sin: it is destructive, it creates ugliness, it destroys hope and leads to despair.

Most of us are aware of finding ourselves in this situation in one way or another and accept it as a consequence of our sin but it raises the question of why those who have not sinned seriously in any way suffer the same consequences and, therefore, see it as a punishment. But, it is certainly not punishment. These innocents have become the victims of the sins of others. In wars, how many innocent people are caught in the crossfire and lose loved ones or are maimed or lose their homes, their land and their status and identity. War is never the result of God but of man, of how sin corrupts. And it is here that we begin to discover the true destructiveness of sin on human life and why Our Lady constantly calls on us to pray for the conversion of sinners.

But the story of the Leper also helps us understand better the sacrifice Jesus made by giving his life for us "that we may have life to the full". Although Jesus asked the Leper not to tell anyone he does and all of sudden their roles are reversed. Now, the leper is welcomed back into the community but Jesus is forced to live outside the community and becomes isolated and excluded. He takes the place of the Leper just as he took the place of each of us sinners when he embraced the cross where he accepted to be rejected, isolated and excluded from the community even to the point of being killed outside the City. Willingly (and lovingly) Jesus took our place but, his victory over death in his resurrection the fruits is which is life for ever, he shares with us all.

Yesterday was Valentine's Day. Today, we learn what true love is and that Jesus is our true Valentine!

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen