

## Homily 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday Year B 2024

The Biblical word translated as “leper” has a very different meaning to our understanding of it today. The people Fr. Damien helped on Molokai had Hansen's disease which we commonly call leprosy. The Bible refers to a **group of skin diseases** called *tzaraat* characterized by scaling and peeling. The Hebrew word refers to this a cluster of skin diseases which was believed to render a person ritually polluted. Unfortunately, scholars have translated the word *tzaraat* as leprosy

In biblical times people could and often did recover from these skin conditions, hence the need to be certified clean by the priest. Doesn't this remind you of sin and the sacrament of reconciliation? A Norwegian scientist, Gerhard Hansen, discovered the biomedical cause of leprosy, an extremely chronic but not very infectious disease. Spouses rarely contract it from their infected partners. Basically, it causes a loss of sensation and a progressive though painless ulceration of the extremities. Facial nodules develop, but leprosy very rarely affects the scalp and is never white in colour.

The healing by Jesus in the gospel, however, is more profound because the ‘leper’ in the story had to live apart from the community because of his condition. Not heeding Jesus' request and telling others about his healing leads Jesus to be forced to live outside the community in the leper's place. Isn't this what Jesus did on the cross? Jesus took all our sins on his back and was excluded from the community? He did all this for our benefit, Jesus saved us from an eternal death and won life for us so that we could live as a community of love and friendship.

### **Maum Jean**

A boy with polio aged 3 ended up on an estate in Gorgia after his parents abandoned him in hospital. The estate had a number of black people working there and one of them **Maum Jean** had a special gift for healing even though she had no education and couldn't read. Her skill with natural plants and roots however helped and healed so many people they called her Maum the name for **'Mother'**. Everyone on the estate, especially the children for whom she had a very special love and care, thought of themselves as one of her children. She took a great interest in the boy with polio and somehow knew that if he did not use his legs they would atrophy. He wore callipers and used crutches to move around but could not use his muscles. Maum Jean had a deep and open faith often calling on the Lord's help as she cared for people and especially with this little boy. She spent every evening with him massaging his muscles even to the point where it hurt but she would sooth him with stories and songs to help him through the pain. After each treatment she would talk earnestly to the Lord and explain that she was doing what she could but would need help and she asked for a sign when he was ready. Eventually she introduced the boy into a river nearby so he could splash around believing the force of the water would help him. The treatment continued night after night but the boy could still not walk without his supports. Then, one morning when he was twelve years old, she told him she had a surprise for him and took him outside and stood him against an oak tree. Taking away his crutches and braces she stepped away from him and said *“I want you to come to me.”* Pleading and crying loudly, he was too frightened to move forward. But, unlike previous occasions, Maum Jean said firmly and with power. ***“The Lord has spoken. So, walk to me now!”*** Despite his fears and reluctance, he felt a force pushing him to make first one faltering step, then another and another until he fell into her open arms; both fell down weeping. It took two more years for him to walk normally but he never used his crutches again. He eventually left the estate and moved on. Years later when he heard that Maum Jean was dying he went to see her and sat with her a long time. She hoped he remembered all the things she had taught him then said *“It's so beautiful!”* sighed and died. Then the most extraordinary thing happened. In the semidarkness her face bearing a beautiful smile glowed for about ten seconds. Others with him saw it too!!

The main thing she taught me, he said, was that **nothing is a barrier when love is strong enough.** Not age. Not race. Not death. Not anything!!

**Bill Gates dies and goes to heaven,**

where Saint Peter gives him a nice, modern six-bedroom house with a pretty garden and a tennis court. Pleased with his lot, Bill quickly settles into the afterlife.

One day he is out walking when he bumps into a man wearing a fine tailored suit.

"That's really nice," says Bill. "Where did you get it?"

"Actually," says the man, "I was given 50 of these, plus two mansions, a yacht, a golf course and four Rolls-Royces."

"Wow, were you a pope or a doctor healing the terminally ill?" asks Bill.

"No, I was the captain of the Titanic."

Bill storms off to see Saint Peter. "How come the captain of a sunken ship gets all that while I, the inventor of the Windows Operating System gets a crummy little house?" he asks.

Saint Peter replies, "The Titanic only crashed once."

**An Old man attended a Faith Healing session**

The preacher said "Stand up and walk"

Then the old man proceeded to stand up from his wheelchair and slowly walked forward. The shocked crowd yelled in praise.

The preacher asked him: "*How are you feeling now?*"

The old man replied: "*I still can't see!!*"