

## 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, Homily 2021

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46; Psalm 32:1-2,5,11; I Cor. 10:31-11:1; Mark 1:40-45

Our gospel begins, **“A leper came to Jesus...”** It seems so natural, but this was a radical move by a courageous man. Lepers weren't supposed to approach anyone. In fact, in my studying this week I read lepers were required to stay anywhere from 14 feet to 150 feet away in a strong wind. (And we struggle with 6 feet of distance). Moreover, as we read in our O.T. passage from Leviticus, they had to wear torn clothes, cover their faces and cry out “Unclean, Unclean”. It wasn't going to be easy to get to Jesus. He had so many barriers in the way. Leprosy in biblical times included a variety of skin diseases, but the results were basically the same – physical, spiritual and emotional separation. To most, it was a death sentence.

Can you imagine what it was like to be a leper in Jesus' day – to live as an outcast, to be excluded, separated from those you loved and to live basically in a perpetual state of quarantine.

Through COVID, we have been given a glimpse of the plight of people who are forced to quarantine, but to live in a perpetual state of quarantine is a whole other matter. Plus, the lepers of Jesus' day didn't get to quarantine in their “Bubble” with family and friends. Thank God we can! Instead they were outcasts - forced to live away from family, friends and their faith community. In addition, many were shamed by those who believed leprosy was a sign of God's judgment.

Thus, for this leper to come to Jesus was radical. Was it desperation? Was it faith? Whatever it was it took great courage, humility and faith for this man to come to Jesus.

Instead of keeping his distance he goes to Jesus crying out “Unclean, Unclean” kneels before him (maybe as an act of worship) and says, **“If you will, you can make me clean.”**

Right off the bat, this leper teaches us not to let anything hinder us from coming to Jesus. Nothing! No emotional, spiritual or physical pain or wound or sadness. Nothing that we have done or has been done to us. Nothing past, present or future should hinder us from coming to Jesus. Jesus said, “No one who comes to me will I cast out” (John 6:37).

Not only that, he also teaches us how to pray. How to make our request known to God. In humbleness before God he asked first for God's will to be done. **“If you will.”** Then, in faith he asked for what he believed Jesus could do and what he wanted. **“You can make me clean.”** The man's prayer is so honest and true that it echo's or foreshadows Jesus' own prayer in the garden before he was arrested. “If you will, take this cup from me. Not my will but yours be done.”

Jesus answered his prayer saying, “I will, be made clean.” This is Jesus’ will for all us – to cleanse us from all that separates us from God. Cleanse us from our sins and brokenness and lead us to life.

It is interesting that the man doesn’t ask to be healed, but to be “made clean”. To be “made clean” indicates that he is more interested in his relationship with God and his ability to worship than in his physical healing. The word healing never occurs in this story, but the word clean or cleansed occurs four times. Again, it seems to indicate that what the leper was truly after was restoration with God, his family and worshipping community. He was more interested in his spiritual cleansing than his physical healing.

Friends, the reality is, this side of heaven we do not always get healing. But God always wills our cleansing our soul-healing. Jesus always desires our union with God and with one another, the body of Christ.

This man wanted cleansing so much that he was willing to come to Jesus. Willing to ignore all the nay-sayers. All the voices of others who told him he would only be rejected, he would never get close enough to Jesus. Instead, this leper came to Jesus. He was also willing to silence all the negative voices in his own head that told him he couldn’t or shouldn’t. Instead, he came!

How often do we come to Jesus? How often do we really come with vulnerable, transparent, and courageous hearts?

If we’re honest, we have a tendency to hide. We hide our struggles. We hide our addictions. We hide our loneliness, our sadness and our fears. We hide our struggling marriages, We hide the pain of our wandering children. We hide our broken dreams. We hide behind our masks. We know all about masks. We have used emotional masks, relational masks and even spiritual masks long before Covid-19 thrust masks on our faces.

I know I hide. I hide my anger. I hide my depression. I hide my insecurities. I hide in all kinds of self-protective ways. Don’t we all?

The good news is we don’t have to hide. We don’t have to run. Before Jesus we do not have to wear masks. Like this leper, we just need to come to Jesus acknowledging our need and our sins. I have heard our sin called “leprosy of the soul.” We all have it. We are in this struggle together. Every person deals with brokenness and the leprosy of sin within us. None of us is spared from this inner sickness of the soul- except Jesus!

Thus, what we most need is Jesus. He never sinned, but became sin that we might live, that we might have life. We need to come to Jesus.

One of my favorite songs speaks to this truth. It’s by Chris Rice, called “Untitled Hymn” or “Come to Jesus”: **“Weak and wounded sinner, lost and left to die. O raise your heads for love is passing by. Come to Jesus, come to Jesus, come to Jesus and live...”**

When we come to Jesus, He is always moved with compassion. He always has mercy to offer because His desire is to heal, cleans and forgive. He sees our suffering. He knows our burdens. As Jesus reached out and touched the Leper with compassion and love, Jesus reaches out his hand to touch you and me. Jesus knew the man's leprosy, but even more he knew and saw the man's suffering. Jesus knows! He knows all our burdens all our masks, all the leprosy's of our souls and offers us hope, forgiveness and cleansing.

So many people in our world go through life feeling Unclean, unwanted, unloved. Mother Theresa said, "The greatest poverty in the world is the poverty of being unloved. What a difficult and painful thing to go through life crying out in silent suffering, "unclean, unwanted, unloved." Too often this silent cry hinders us from coming to Jesus.

Come to Jesus, pour out your heart in humble prayer and let his healing, cleansing love give you life.

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday, which starts us on a 40 day spiritual pilgrimage to prepare our hearts and lives for the greatest offering of self-donative love the universe has ever seen, the Passion - Jesus' suffering, death and glorious resurrection. On the cross, Jesus takes all our sins, all the leprosy's of our souls and sacrifices his very life that we might have life. Take this Lenten season to Come to Jesus in ways you may have never done before.

Come to Jesus: Tell him all your sins, all your burdens. Ask him to come into your heart. Tell him all your joys and celebrations as well.

Come to Jesus: Spend time in prayer. Time in silence with God. Letting God love you! I mentioned last week in my written homily encouraging us to spend 10 - 20 minutes a day sitting with Jesus in silence. Letting Jesus love you. Let him love you and reach out his merciful hand touching and healing the core of your being.

Come to Jesus: Go to reconciliation, pour out your heart to Jesus there and receive his forgiveness, mercy and grace. We are promised that when we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us.

Come to Jesus in your fasting, devotions, and offerings. The Enemy would just as soon you fast, pray, and give to the poor as long as it keeps you from coming to Jesus. So, If you fast, come to Jesus in your fasting. When you pray, come to Jesus with a truly open heart. When you give to the poor, see Christ in them. Come to Jesus through and in them. If you give up chocolate or Netflix come to Jesus in your offering and sacrifice.

If we didn't know it already, one thing we have learned through this pandemic is that health care workers are desperately needed and essential to the ongoing safety, health and healing of our county and world. They are front-line workers, serving those in need, especially when they have COVID-19 and other contagious illnesses.

If you have an illness and go to the hospital or a clinic, the nurses and doctors will not reject you, but instead they will do what they can to help you and encourage your healing.

How much more when we come to Jesus. Jesus is the Divine Physician, making him **Thee Healthcare Worker** - body, mind and soul. Jesus is on the front lines of your life and mine. Jesus wills your spiritual healing. He desires your fellowship and our communion with one another.

Come to Jesus and fall into the mystery of his eternal mercy and limitless love.

“A Leper came to Jesus.” This is my story, I pray it is yours too!

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve

“Untitled Hymn” or “Come to Jesus” by Chris Rice

**Weak and wounded sinner**

**Lost and left to die**

**Oh, raise your head for Love is passing by**

**Come to Jesus, Come to Jesus, Come to Jesus and live**

**Now your burden's lifted**

**And carried far away**

**And precious blood has washed away the stain**

**So, sing to Jesus, Sing to Jesus, Sing to Jesus and live**

**And like a newborn baby**

**Don't be afraid to crawl**

**And remember when you walk sometimes we fall**

**So, fall on Jesus, Fall on Jesus, Fall on Jesus and live**

**Sometimes the way is lonely**

**And steep and filled with pain**

**So if your sky is dark and pours the rain**

**Then cry to Jesus, Cry to Jesus, Cry to Jesus and live**

**Oh and when the love spills over**

**And music fills the night**

**And when you can't contain your joy inside**

**Then dance for Jesus, Dance for Jesus, Dance for Jesus and live**

**With your final heartbeat**

**Kiss the world goodbye**

**Then go in peace, and laugh on Glory's side**

**And fly to Jesus, Fly to Jesus, Fly to Jesus and live.**

**Fly to Jesus, Sing to Jesus, Come to Jesus and live**

