

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deeply moved with compassion and concern, Jesus touches our hearts when we cry to Him to be healed from our ‘spiritual leprosy’ – just as He did to the leper in His day even by breaking the Jewish Law.

Leprosy in Jesus' day referred to any of the skin-diseases that were considered ritually or ceremonially unclean in Jewish society and religion. In his pre-scientific age, it was the most feared disease and was considered to be highly contagious. As per Jewish Law, such people were treated as social and religious outcasts and were not permitted to take part in the religious life of the community. They were segregated from the community and made to live in tents outside villages and towns. They were required to cry out "unclean, unclean" to people who passed by so that they would stay far away from them. Touching them was a greater prohibition because of the fear of contagion. If ever, they got cured, a priest had to declare it and restore them to social and religious communion after their offering of a sacrifice to God in thanksgiving. Leprosy was considered to be a punishment for one's sins. Therefore they were held personally responsible for their own illness and affliction, that is, suffering for their own wrongdoings. Today's gospel text tells us how a personally, socially and religiously despised and rejected leprosy patient was rendered holistic liberation by Jesus.

The desperation and anxiety of the leper mentioned in today's gospel is reflected in the way he approached Jesus. Though he was forbidden by law to go close to healthy persons, he was courageously proactive and daring in his approach to Jesus. He came to him with great humility, kneeling before and begging him to cleanse him from his dreaded skin-disease (1:40). Secondly, the text implies that he firmly believed and trusted in Jesus' power to heal him. That is why he said, “You can make me clean”. Thirdly, by saying, “Only if you are willing to make me clean, you can” (1:40), he submitted himself into Jesus' hands, He begged Jesus to heal him, only if he willed.

Today's gospel invites us to identify ourselves both with the leper referred in it and Jesus the holistic Healer. The former application leads us to the discovery of areas of uncleanness in our life and to examine the sins, habits, addictions, attitudes and behavior that cut us off from God and community. The latter application makes us realize how, as Jesus' disciples, we can continue his mission of reaching out to the rejected, the despised and those who are cut off from community with our healing touch.

For Jesus, physical healing was only an external sign of spiritual or inner healing. Therefore, cleansing the leper is a sign to tell us that He has the power to heal and liberate us from our inner or spiritual leprosy. This holistic healing ministry of Jesus is very much related to His purpose of coming into the world, that is, to establish God's Kingdom.

We need to identify our own spiritual leprosy. Once we admit our spiritual and psychological leprosy, we can also follow the steps followed by this leper to receive holistic healing from Jesus: (1) to approach Jesus with the same humility by falling on our knees, confessing our sins before Him and begging Him to cleanse us; (2) to place our full faith and trust in His healing power; (3) to submit ourselves totally to His holy will; (4) to humbly beg Him with our petitions to cleanse and heal us. Jesus touches our hearts when we cry to Him to be healed from our spiritual 'leprosy' – just as He did to the leper in His day by breaking the Jewish Law.

Just as the leper begged, we too can plead with him trusting fully in his healing power: "If it is your will, you take this illness from me; besides begging for mercy, we must submit ourselves fully at His feet and request Him to do what he wants with us. Once touched and healed by Him, we too can proclaim our experience of restoration of holistic health which in turn will become a testimony of our faith.

This passage should motivate us to bring holistic health to those who are alienated, isolated or separated from God and human society due to sin, crime, addictions and any other wrongdoing. Giving human dignity to those whom society considers outcasts and restoring their dignity should be one of our concerns. Today, the conditions of the poor, the physically and mentally challenged, the victims of HIV and AIDS, who suffer from social segregation, etc., are like that of the leprosy patient of today's gospel. Today's gospel-message should motivate us to enter into the pain of such people and stretch out our hands like Jesus did. Let us regret for the times, we held back our hands instead of extending them towards such people.

Lord Jesus, I am an unclean person in mind and spirit. Kindly look at my miserable condition and show your boundless mercy towards me. I humbly fall on my knees and beg you to cleanse me. I place my full faith in you and trust in your healing power. I submit myself totally to your Holy will. O Divine Healer, if you will, you can make me clean. Touch my heart; cleanse me and heal me. Amen.