

Sunday6-B7 homily

According to the book of Leviticus (Lev 13-14) leprosy was not just a contagious disease, but also a sign of spiritual impurity, so for these two reasons its sufferer was excluded from communal life until he has been healed and ritually purified. For ritual purification a sin offering was required. Leprosy was considered as a plague with which God strikes its sufferer because of his sins; see for example how God strikes with a plague the Egyptians for their sins against the Jewish people (Deut 28:27), or Miriam (Number 12:10-15) and Uzziah the King (2 Chronicles 26:19-23). So leprosy and sin and God's punishment were strongly associated with each other, and although today we know that leprosy is not necessarily a sign of God's punishment, but can be caused simply by a bacterial infection, there is a lot of similarity between the two. Sin eats us inside, it damages us gradually, because by our sin we damage our relationship both with God and one another, while the leprosy bacteria eat the person both inside and outside; it eats the bones, flesh and the skin, and because of the religious regulations, as we heard in the first reading, the sufferer is cut out from relationship from loved ones- no more touching of others, including loved ones; can you imagine living without any human touch? We know how human and how important it is to touch another person, even just by a handshake. A lot of people experienced during this pandemic how difficult it was to live in isolation, because of the lockdown. I remember those images on the TV of grandchildren and grandparents who were so ecstatic to be able to give a hug to each other again after many weeks of lockdown.

In the Gospel reading we read about Jesus' compassion with those who are isolated due to illness, such as leprosy. Mark says in his Gospel that Jesus felt sorry for the leper, but he did even more than that, he stretched out His hand and touched him, a hugely symbolic act about how God comes to our aid and touches in us what needs to be healed, because he feels sorry for us. He is sorrowful, because he sees how spiritual, moral and physical illness and disease destroys what is most precious, ie. our relationships. Jesus is there with you, around you, to stretch out His healing hand, and He can heal us, because He was struck for our sins; so He has already paid the price for our spiritual and moral sins. You just have to go to Him, repent on your spiritual knees and ask Him to heal you, just as the leper did.

Today Jesus' true followers, including the clergy and your loved ones and people around you, are the hand through whom God the Father stretches out to you and touches your life. However, notice that it is the leper in the first place who comes to Jesus and pleads on his knees to cure him.

This leper symbolises those sinners who are not happy with living in sin, and don't want to live anymore in a spiritual isolation from God the Father and from others. This leper leaves behind the lifestyle and sense of condemnation by society, and wants to get back to God and to his own family; back into the most important relationships he has, by way of healing. He symbolises the sinner who doesn't want to live a fake life anymore, a life in spiritual isolation from his loved ones, but wants to return to them being cleaned and cured from his moral and spiritual sin or addiction, and live the life close to God and his loved ones. They are God's gift. But for this to happen the sinner has to seek Jesus and humble himself before Jesus, kneeling spiritually before Him and pleading Him to heal Him, absolve him from his sins, and the good news is what Jesus says to the leper: 'Of course I want to heal you!'