

Sixth Sunday Per Annum (B)
February 15, 2015

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" (Mk.1:41).

This Sunday's Gospel reading, in continuation with last Sunday's text, describes another healing – a miracle. In fact, in the Gospel of St. Mark which we are reading this year, the miracles of Jesus comprise one fourth of the entire text. Jesus, we are told, is moved with pity; touches the leper, heals him and instructs him to fulfill the prescriptions of the law concerning leprosy (*Lev.* 13, 14); and what is strange, Jesus sternly warns the leper to say nothing to anyone about his healing.

Though the miracles of Jesus comprise one fourth of the text of St. Mark's Gospel, they were never intended to prove our Lord's divinity and His mission and purpose among us on earth. They illustrate these things. This is why Jesus sternly warns the leper to say nothing about the healing. What matters is not the healing – though it is important – but faith in Jesus as the Son of God. So we see that miracles and miraculous cures are often joined to the forgiveness of sins as a way of legitimising our Lord's act of forgiveness. What matters most is repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of St. Mark speaks to our powerlessness. In the ancient world and specifically in the Jewish milieu, no one was more powerless than a leper. Lepers were outcasts; literally cast out of the community forced to wear distinctive clothing and to be segregated, as we heard in the first Reading from the *Book of Leviticus*. Jesus however, touches the leper. In so doing Jesus becomes ritually impure but in this action He illustrates that God can heal everything. Jesus is not afraid to touch our leprosy—whatever it may be, because His grace is infinitely more powerful. Christ our Lord is the divine physician.

If you choose you can make me clean. (Mk. 1: 40). Just as the leper invited Jesus into his life, we too must invite Jesus to heal what is wounded in us either because of our own sins or because we have been sinned against. Jesus enters into our lives and shows us that we never have to be alone and out of control. The poor leper was out of control because his whole existence, his whole life was defined by his illness. He was a *leper*. His illness gave him his identity. It is not difficult to be out of control when we allow anything other than God to determine our lives, our identity. Before we are defined by what we do or what may be afflicting us, we are defined by *who* we are – God's children. In the turmoil that our lives can become, we sometimes forget this. This is why the prescription for the healing of the human condition – wounded as it is – is always the same: repentance and faith in Christ Jesus, in whom we are sons and daughters of God. This is the medicine which we can never do without.

If you choose you can make me clean. (Mk. 1: 40). On Wednesday will begin the holy season of Lent, a time of prayer, penance, fasting, almsgiving and repentance. Individually and together with Christians throughout the world we will heed the Gospel message of repentance; a message that is always relevant because it is essential to the transformative manner of life that God offers us in Jesus Christ our Lord – a life of growth and unity with God in whose image and likeness we have been created.

It is a manner of living which is characterised by peace; the peace of victory over sin and self, and the banishment of the illusion of self-sufficiency. The Gospel is indeed the good news of salvation and liberation. It is a life of freedom from sin and its consequences. Though you never hear it, a silent prayer is said by the priest at the end of the Gospel reading. *Per evangelica dicta, deleantur nostra delicta: By the words of the Gospel may our sins be blotted out.* This silent prayer affirms our belief that in the hearing of the Gospel we are brought to faith in Jesus Christ who came into the world *not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him* (Jn. 3:17). The reading of the Gospel is much more than proclamation; in it Christ becomes present. Jesus who healed the leper is no less present to us today with his offer of salvation. We need not be bound by the limitations of sin. We are defined neither by our illnesses nor by our sins. God can heal us. Let us pray for one another as we enter into the Holy Season of Lent; that all of us may discover anew the healing that comes to us from the Word of the Gospel and the Word made Flesh, the Holy Eucharist.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVpEvPn-YDw>