

FEBRUARY 11, 2018

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 [LV 13:1-2, 44-46](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 32:1-2, 5, 11](#)

R. (7) I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

Reading 2 [1 COR 10:31—11:1](#)

Gospel [MK 1:40-45](#)

A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean." The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once. He said to him, "See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them." The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

HOMILY:

As I had shared a couple of weeks ago, I took a couple days this last week to travel to the Philadelphia area, before Lent begins this next Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, to visit the area where I lived in my middle and High School days. With a friend, we drove to my old home town, Newark DE, which was an eerie experience of flood of so many old memories from a place and a time where I had not been for years! As we drove toward my old family house, we passed a neighborhood where, as a boy, memories surfaced about my attendance there in a Catholic Youth prayer group led by a generous woman whose name was Kitty Hart. Kitty was a beautiful, devout woman who "wore her faith on her sleeve." I remember praying near Kitty in our parish church. She was so filled with the joy of the Lord that she was "that woman" who sang extra loud, prayed very expressively, and seemed to some, I imagine, a bit odd. Yet, because of who she believed Jesus to be, it seemed she had no time to keep her feelings carefully hemmed in!

At the end of one of our prayer meetings, Kitty invited all of us high school students to pray for each other, by placing our hands on each other's shoulders or heads, as the youth being prayed for requested whatever special need required God's help. Caught up with enthusiasm for the healing power of God, I remember asking the group to pray for a healing. They went right at it—surrounding me with prayer, hands on my shoulders and praying with great earnestness. Kitty even began to speak in her wordless pleading that I would later learn was called, "praying in tongues." Once the prayer was over, I expressed gratitude and said, "I hope I'll be healed." To this Kitty, challenging me to a deeper faith and trust, said, "You hope? You must believe it can happen!" Feeling a bit chastised, *I replied that I did believe!* Then Kitty said, while hands were still on my shoulders, what healing do you believe God will do?" My reply, which made hands immediately repulse, "A healing from poison ivy!"

While hands were quickly withdrawn, understandably concerned about catching my very contagious affliction (I later assured the group that my "disease" was on a part of my body far from their touch), how far was their self-protective reaction from that of Jesus in today's gospel,

who, we hear, instead of repulsing his hand from the leper, stretches out his hand right into the middle of what was considered the most contagious and most God-forsaken place possible, into the contagion known as leprosy. For this is who Jesus is for each of us—he comes right into the middle of our human weakness, failure, and illness, with his life that is hope, strength, and restoration. For, in illness, we can feel weakened, defective, and hopeless. And, just as when God exalted the dust of creation with his touch in the book of Genesis, so too His touch of re-creation for the leper, the divine touch, right into the fallen humanity, we too discover the path to restoration and life.

However, Jesus' compassionate reaching himself into the middle of human sickness in the gospel is matched with the seemingly tentative reaction of faith by the leper like that which produced my approbation by Kitty Hart. For the leper's words to Jesus, "if you wish, you can make me clean," might seem tepid in faith and lacking confidence in the healing power of Jesus. And yet, they are about more than this. For we hear earlier in the gospel that, before the healing touch of Jesus, the leper kneels down before Him. In this act of worship, the afflicted man professes his faith in one worthy of worship, the Divine presence in Jesus. So, his faith and humility are both strong. His words, far from faithless, are words of confidence in the sovereignty of the Lord and the perfection of his providential plan. His words, "if you will it," speak not of faithlessness, but rather faith in God's ways. "If you will it" is the man's placing himself in the inerrant providence, that is, the workings of God. If he is healed, Jesus is Lord. If he is not, the leper suggests, Jesus remains Lord and the Divine Will remains supreme, awaiting another time of restoration, somewhere along the path into eternity, for, as Jesus says, about our healing, he does will it.

All of us have deep needs, needs for healing, both physical and spiritual. What is your need? As you come to present yourself at the moment of Communion with the Lord, the very same Body of the Lord that touched the leper and made him clean, bring your need for healing. And as he touches you, let your heart take up the words of the leper, confident in God's sovereignty in life and death, sickness and health: "If you wish, you can make me clean." And in this supreme act of faith in God's providence, wherever that will take us, reach out to his healing, inclining the ear of your heart to his touch, and hear him say, as is His divine will, "I do will it, be made clean." Whenever, in God's good time, this cleansing happens, we each come, knowing of our need, and declaring our confidence in the healing, restoring mercy of God, available to us, according to his promise, here at this altar.