

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-B

February 11, 2018

First Reading – Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 32

Second Reading – Corinthians 10:31-11:1

Gospel – Mark 1:40-45

My dear people of God:

I wish to start our reflection today with our Responsorial Psalm: *I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.*

I feel that this must have been the prayer of the leper when he approached Jesus. Beyond physiological or medical leprosy, we have another dreadful leprosy. That is sin. It is in this sense that I encourage you, my dear brothers and sisters to focus your mind and heart on the readings of the sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Lent starts this coming Wednesday, Valentine's Day. Make it a special day of the heart. Let that heart be attached to the King of Hearts. Real happiness exists if the heart carries no guilt.

The psalmist says:

“Blessed is he whose fault is taken away, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD imputes no guilt, in whose spirit there is no guile. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I covered not. I said, "I confess my faults to the LORD," and you took away the guilt of my sin. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you just; exult, all you upright of heart.

Without fear of any consequence arising from his action, the leper approached Jesus despite the prohibition from the Law of Moses. What did Moses command?

Let us go to the First Reading from the Book of Leviticus. It gives just a few of the horrible rules established by the Mosaic community to protect itself from leprosy. In the ancient times leprosy was believed to be deforming, incurable, and contagious. Leprosy included most skin disorders: Hansen's disease which is leprosy proper, psoriasis, skin cancer, and boils. Lepers were ostracized by the community and were forced to live outside the villages and towns. They were referred to as the Living Dead. Lepers had to wear ragged clothes. They had to let their hair go uncombed and uncut. As today's reading says, they had to cover their mouths with one hand and call out "Unclean, unclean" as they walked. Anyone who came into any contact whatsoever with a leper was considered to be unclean like the leper.

Now, let us go to the Second Reading. Paul here is advocating that there is one maxim of which no Christian must lose sight: that whether he eats or drinks or whatever else he may do, he must do it so as to bring glory to God. This is a sufficient rule to regulate every man's conscience and practice in all indifferent things, where there are no express commands or prohibitions; a general direction that is applicable to eating and drinking at all times; and the phrase "*whatsoever you do*" is evidently designed by Paul to make the direction universal; whatsoever you do; in all the actions and plans of life; whatever be your schemes, your desires, your doings, let all be done to the glory of God; whatever plan or purpose will tend to advance His kingdom, and to make Him better known and loved, will be to His glory.

We may observe in regard to this:

(1) that the rule is "universal." It extends to everything. If in so small matters as eating and drinking we should seek to honor God; then, afortiori or with a far greater reason, we should in all other things.

(2) it is intended that we should honor God in our families and among our friends. We eat with them; we share together the bounties of Providence; and God designs that we should honor Him when we partake of His mercies, and that thus our daily enjoyments should be sanctified by a constant effort to glorify Him.

(3) we should devote the strength which we derive from the bounties of His hand to His honor and in His service.

He gives us food; He makes it nourishing;

He invigorates our frame; and that strength should not be devoted to purposes of sin, and profligacy, and corruption. It is an act of high dishonor to God, when He gives us strength, that we should at once devote that strength to corruption and to sin.

The overriding question which must determine all that any Christian does is the question of whether or not his actions will build up, edify, strengthen and encourage the church of Christ; and if any action whatsoever falls short of such utility to bless and honor God's kingdom, then it is forbidden to the child of God. God's glory is paramount; human appetite and convenience have no weight whatever when opposed to God's glory. Paul was a great leader who refused to do anything that might hinder people outside the church or alienate those within it.

Now, let us go to the Gospel. Please remember that today's Gospel is the immediate continuation of last Sunday's Gospel.

Two weeks ago, we heard that Jesus entered the synagogue in Capernaum on a sabbath. This is the village of Peter and Andrew. He was teaching there when a demoniac interrupted Him. Jesus exorcized him. The evangelist Mark noted two things: (1) the people were amazed at His teaching because He taught with authority, unlike the scribes; (2) the people were astonished because He expelled demons.

Last week, we heard that upon leaving the synagogue, Jesus entered the house of Peter where He cured Peter's mother-in-law.

Today, we hear that a leper approached Jesus. Please bear in mind that we are still in Peter's house.

The dialogue here is so telling. "*If you want to, you can cure me*". Jesus, moved with pity, stretched out His hand, touched the leper, and said to him, "*Be made clean.*" Jesus did not see the unclean leper, or his disease. He was not concerned with the strict prohibitions of Jewish society. Jesus did not see a leper at all; He saw a human soul in desperate need. He stretched out His hand and touched him. He healed him with His touch. He had the boldness to directly approach Jesus and *surrender* his fate to Jesus. And in doing so he humbled himself by kneeling down before Him. He began his request by acknowledging that he would accept whatever Jesus decides, "*If you wish*" then made his request, "*you can make me clean*". He believed that Jesus could

heal him, he asked Jesus to heal him, but only if it was Jesus' wish. Putting it another way, "Thy will be done.

That **surrender** that would push us to sincerely pray, "Thy will be done, or to echo the words of the leper, "if you wish, you can" and to follow that by boldly and humbly placing our needs before the Lord. Jesus can literally open the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf, and the minds of our ignorance. Jesus can also do this in a figurative way that would allow us to see Him, hear Him and understand Him with our hearts. What is important is to follow the example of the leper and **surrender** to the will of God so as to be open to however He wills to answer our prayers.

By His curing of the leper Jesus puts Himself in the category of a truly outstanding Healer. It is interesting to note that during His healing of the leper Jesus reaches out His hand and touches the man. This is a clear breach of one of the rules set down by Moses; touch was forbidden for fear of passing on the infection. But, of course, touch is often an important part of the healing process and Jesus does not hesitate to touch the man He is healing. In hospitals the doctors carry out the physical treatment but it is often the TLC or the tender loving care given by the nurses that actually brings about the real healing.

As we prepare for the observance of Ash Wednesday and the Lenten Season, it might benefit us to surrender, or to surrender anew, our lives to the Lord. Let us allow ourselves to be touched by the ashes.

When we consider the disease of leprosy we can see too that it has many similarities with that other great disease that afflicts mankind, namely SIN. Leprosy separates human beings from each other, but sin separates us both from God and from each other. Sin brings division and damages the cohesion of the community. This passage continues the narrative of Jesus' mission immediately following His baptism in the Jordan and the call of the first disciples.

As the Messiah and the Beloved Son of the Celestial Father, His mission is to proclaim the Good News of the coming of God's kingdom. God's rule over all creation would bring to an end the domination of Satan, characterized by all forms of untruth, violence, sickness, and death. That the power of God's rule is present in Jesus becomes evident to the amazement of the people by His teaching with authority, His healing, and His casting out demons.