



Contributed by Fr. Ray Reitzel, C.R.

Born in Waterloo and is #9 in a family of 9 boys and 3 girls. One brother (Harry) is a C.R. priest, and two sisters are Notre Dame Sisters. He taught for 31 years at St. Jerome's H.S, Kitchener, and at St. Joseph-Scollard Hall in North Bay. He served in 4 parishes for 17 years. He is now semi-retired and living at Resurrection Manor, Waterloo, a residence for retired CRs.

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME FEBRUARY 14, 2021 (Year B)

GATHERING TIME *(10-15 minutes)*

Introduction to the Word:

In today's Gospel **Jesus cures a leper**. I did this reflection three years ago. I made a few changes in it. It certainly connects well with the Coronavirus, COVID-19, which is a pandemic today.

Lepers were among the most piteous of people in ancient (and even not-so-ancient) times. Although little was known then of the origin of the sickness, it was thought to be contagious and therefore greatly feared. The only solution was to isolate the victim, and not allow him/her to approach other people. In public they were required to dishevel their hair, cover their mouths, and sometimes ring a bell, to keep distance from others—similar to the safeguards for the Coronavirus: wear a mask, keep a 6 foot distance, wash hands, quarantine.

Apart from the appalling physical **disintegration of body and limbs**, resulting from leprosy, there was the **social ostracism**, the contempt, and the fear, which the victim suffered. It seems that the disease itself was, for the most part, not particularly painful (Sacred Space), but their being rejected was a real source of pain and suffering. You may have heard about **Fr. Damien DeVeuster, the leper priest**, canonized by Pope John Paul II. There were two leper colonies on the island of Molokai, Hawaii. The first church was built there in 1874. Some priests came and went. Fr. Damien was the first priest to volunteer to serve there **and to stay**. If you **Google** 'Fr. Damien, the leper priest' you will find a full length movie on him, some very interesting clips on his life, and some history of the leper colonies in Molokai.

In those days, all who contracted leprosy were sent to this island to fend for themselves. Some were even pushed off the ship as it got near the shore of the island, and then swam to shore.

Leprosy can be compared to the pandemic, the **Coronavirus**, that we are suffering from right now, and have been for the past several months. Over 400,000 have already died in the USA. In our recent history, many people suffered and died from AIDS. It was new, and was very contagious. Gym teachers, dentists, etc. were required to wear latex gloves in case they touched the blood of an injured student or client. Other serious contagious diseases in the past were the Spanish Flu, Black Plague, tuberculosis, polio, Ebola, etc. When I

was a child, some of us had **scarlet fever**. We were quarantined at home, and were not able to have contact with the public until the fever was under control. A public notice was posted on the front door of homes, to indicate this. People gravely feared to be contaminated by any of these diseases.

Now, compared to mortal/serious sin, where we cut ourselves off from the life and joy of God's love, and from our eternal home in heaven, **mortal sin** is a thousand times worse, and more. We are reminded of this on **Ash Wednesday**, this week, the beginning of Lent, when we have ashes put on our foreheads and hear the words, "**Remember, you are dust, and unto dust you will return!**"

How literally true this is. **EVERYTHING** comes from the earth: every person, everything, comes from the earth, and **EVERYTHING** ends back into the earth.

And Lent is the time we use to be healed of the **leprosy of sin** and prepare ourselves, by the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Prayer and Penance, for the Paschal mystery, to die and **rise with Christ for Eternity!!!!**

Warm-up Activity: *(about 8 – 10 minutes)*

Some parishes will celebrate the Sacrament of **anointing of the sick** a few times a year. On this day, those who are sick—physically, emotionally or spiritually—are encouraged to seek out the Sacrament of Anointing when they are "touched" and anointed with the Oil of the Sick. It is a day to pray for healing for those in need, to pray with the belief that healing, and restoration to fullness of health, is indeed possible through the generous grace and mercy of God.

As Catholics, we believe that the **Anointing of the Sick** is not just a Sacrament for those close to death. It is a sacrament that can restore one to health: body, mind and soul, and which has the potential for miraculous healing. We keep in mind that the healing of the soul is far more precious, than the healing of the body.

Have you ever received the Sacrament of Anointing? If so, what did you hope for, prior to receiving the sacrament, and what was the result of your receiving the sacrament?

If you witnessed someone *else* receiving the Sacrament of Anointing, what was that experience like? Have you ever received, or given, non-sacramental healing through human touch, through the embrace of a loved one? Describe the experience.

The Table of the Word

THEME

Leprosy, which is properly known as Hansen's disease, was not always the proper diagnosis of skin diseases during scriptural times. Various skin diseases were labelled as leprosy, when in fact it was not leprosy: acne, dandruff, eczema, ulcers, psoriasis—all of these were labelled as leprosy. It then became the task of the Jewish priest to assess both the severity of the disease, and the impact the disease could have upon the health of the entire community. The priest was then to render judgment according to the laws found in the Book of Leviticus. He also had to judge whether the ailment has been cured. Then the cured person was free to join the community. This is why Jesus sent the healed leper to the priest who would officially declare that the person was "clean" and healed.

Leader: Our God comes with power to save us.

Lord Jesus, healer of body, mind, and soul,
Christ Jesus, companion to the lonely and abandoned,
Lord Jesus, the joy of repentant sinners,

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray (together):

*Lord our God, you have promised to remain forever with those who do what is just and right.
Help us to live in your presence. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving.)*

FIRST READING (Leviticus 13:1–2, 45–46)

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: “When a person has on the skin of the body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of the body, that person shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests.

“A person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of the head be dishevelled; and they shall cover the upper lip and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean.’ A person shall remain unclean as long as the disease persists; and being unclean, that person shall live alone with a dwelling outside the camp.”

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1)

Brothers and sisters: Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Mark 1:40-45)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

A man with leprosy came to Jesus begging him, and kneeling said to Jesus, “If you choose, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him Jesus sent him away at once, saying to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” But the man went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to Jesus from every quarter.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred prayer.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God's own Word, God's way of speaking to you today through his own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it – no need to explain it – just identify it.

COMMENTARY:

In the First Reading, the Book of Leviticus is a catalogue of priestly legislation and laws, like a medical journal, a book of what one should, and should not do. Chapters 11 through 15, from which our first reading is drawn, deal with laws of purity concerning foods and diseases. **Here we find laws concerning the skin disease of leprosy.** The highly contagious nature of leprosy led to the practice of quarantining victims, for it was seen as a disease that had the potential of endangering the entire community. While a medical problem, leprosy gained a religious status, in that it belonged to the jurisdiction of the Jewish priest to interpret the severity of the disease, and then whether or not to enforce the laws of Leviticus concerning the disease. If found to be a danger to the community the victims had to live apart from the community, wear torn clothing, keep their hair unkempt and cry out “unclean!”. Other than perhaps death itself, there was no punishment more severe during that time period than to live apart from the community, completely alone and lacking most normal human contact and intimacy – all for the good of the community. The need to protect the entire community outweighed the needs of the individual. Leviticus identified leprosy as a potential **danger to the well-being of the entire community.**

In the **second reading from 1 Corinthians**, Paul reminded his readers to “*give no offense*” to anyone, by not seeking individual advantage. He reminded them to “*not seek their own advantage*” but to “*be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*”. Paul is exhorting the community to seek harmony, so that the community will not be endangered or even destroyed. For in Leviticus, the health of the entire community outweighs the needs of the individual (e.g. leper in the gospel).

In the past, the “common good” of the community took precedence over “personal rights.” Today we see so often where “**personal rights**” take precedence over the “common good”. It is too bad that today, we do not hear much about the need for “**personal responsibility**”.

The **Gospel of Mark** returns us to the skin disease of leprosy. Here we find Jesus fulfilling one of His mandates: to bring healing to the sick, as **He cures the man with leprosy.** This miracle, this “new” type of teaching by Jesus, certainly reveals His authority and His ability to vanquish His opponents. However, two very significant effects surface as a result of the miracle: One, the miracle brings Jesus to the forefront. This publicity now makes it difficult for Him to move about openly. Why? People now know He can cure the sick, so those in need of healing, seek out Jesus in ever greater numbers, and with ever greater demands. Two, the power to bring healing through human touch is revealed. Remember the **Leviticus laws, by law**, made human **touch** virtually impossible for leprosy victims, for the good of the community, so as not to spread the disease. Jesus cures the leper by touching him, thus breaking the law! This human (divine??) touch brought the man healing, with a powerful result that he could now rejoin the community.

(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or new idea.)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

Leviticus 13:1-2, 45-46 *“That person shall live alone”*

People with leprosy were basically excommunicated from the community, forced to face a life of profound loneliness. You can see this in **movie clips available on Google**. Lepers were the marginalized of their day! What emotions stir within you as you witness how lepers were treated during scriptural days? Do you believe the lack of medical treatment and knowledge, justified the laws of Leviticus concerning diseases? Who are the marginalized today?

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 *“Do everything for the glory of God”*

Paul presents a lifestyle that he believes Christians should adhere to: a life that gives no offense to another, a life of selflessness, by placing the needs of others first, a life which imitates Christ. This is no small task! How is the Christian world doing in this regard? How are you doing personally as you strive to live this Christian life-style?

Mark 1:40-45 *“Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him”*

Many, if not most people, in Jesus' day would be horrified to touch a person with leprosy. Fear had a powerful control over their actions at times. Identify some of the people who are perceived as “unclean” by society today. Are you comfortable in their presence? How can we better welcome them into the embrace of community?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to ‘outreach’ to the larger community. The facilitator should allow for a moderate pause between each of the suggestions for reflection and action.)

1. **Word for the Week:** *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”*

2. **Suggestion for the Week:**

Pope Francis: “In our time, humanity is experiencing a turning point in its history, as we see from the advances being made in so many fields. We can only praise the steps being taken to improve people's welfare in areas such as health care, education, and communications. At the same time, we have to remember that the majority of our contemporaries are barely living from day to day, with dire consequences.” (*The Joy of the Gospel*, #52) Pope Francis reminds us that the marginalized, the “unclean”, still exist in our world. He is calling us to stretch ourselves beyond what society says we ought to do, **to reach out and touch** those most in need, just as Jesus touched the leper. This can be scary. This week, identify someone who is in need of your touch. Reach out to them and embrace them, welcoming them more fully into the community of faith. During this virus epidemic, we can do this by knuckle contact, or elbow contact, a gentle wave of the hand, a kind word, a smile, or electronically, by email, skype, telephone, etc.

This could be a friend or relative with whom we currently have a strained relationship.

This could be a sick friend who simply needs us to be there for them.

This could be a co-worker or classmate who feels lonely and is in need of a friend.

This can help transform the world! Our embrace can make the difference.

3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

Leader: The Lord invites us to reach out and touch people through our prayer, and to take their needs to our God. And so, we pray:

For our world, which in so many ways is in need of God's healing embrace: we pray for an end to all war and violence, all acts of oppression and injustice, all acts which marginalize people, we pray ...

For our Church, to clean up the scandals in the Church, so that it may truly be an instrument of healing and reconciliation, always reminding people of the depth of God's forgiveness, we pray ...

For the sick and “unclean” of our world: may we never fear to reach out and touch them with love, so that we may be instruments of God’s mercy and healing, we pray ...

For those who care for the sick and dying, especially all health care responders, and priests administering the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: may their acts of compassion towards those in need, bring them the reward of God's healing and love, we pray ...

For all those who advocate for the marginalized: may their efforts bring comfort, compassion, and hope to those they serve, we pray ...

For all who have died: may they be rewarded with eternal life at the heavenly wedding feast, with Jesus presiding, we pray ...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

*Lord Jesus, in the psalm today we pray: “Blessed is the one, whose sin is forgiven...
I will confess my sins to the Lord...I will be glad in the Lord and rejoice!
Shout for joy all you upright of heart!”
With your loving touch, Lord, make us eager to heal others, glad to herald a Saviour
whose kingdom includes all. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever. Amen.*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God’s favours toward us today, we pray that all those in our influence, will be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, **OUR FATHER...**

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., (deceased 2012). For information or to become a member: website: www.resurrectionists.ca E-mail: provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca. The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).