

Jesus and the Leper
(6th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B)

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46—The Law for Leprosy

1. Leprosy Laws: lepers brought “to Aaron the priest” or “his sons the priests” (13:1-2)
2. Priestly Judgement: the priest shall “pronounce” the man “unclean” (13:44)
3. Separation from Community: the leper shall cry “unclean” and “dwell alone” (13:45-6)

Psalm 32—The Joy of Forgiveness

1. Forgiveness: “Blessed is he whose *transgression* is *forgiven*...” (v. 1)
2. Confession: “*I acknowledged my sin to you, I did not hide my iniquity*” (v. 5)

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1—Whatever You Do, Do for the Glory of God

1. All for the Greater Glory: “Do everything to the glory of God” (10:31)

Mark 1:40-45—Jesus and the Man with Leprosy

1. Leper: notice his actions and his words
 - a. He “comes” to Jesus and “beseeches/begs” him
 - b. He “kneels” before Jesus
 - c. “*If you will, you can make me clean* (Greek *katharizō*) (1:40)
2. Jesus’ Response:
 - a. He is “moved with pity” and “*touches*” him with his “hand” (!)
 - c. He speaks: “*I will, be made clean*”
3. Healing Miracle: and “immediately” the man was made clean (1:42)
4. Messianic Secret: Jesus commands the leper to “say nothing to any one”
5. The Law for Lepers: Jesus follows the Law of Moses (see Lev 14:1-32)
 - a. Exam: “Show yourself to *the priest*,” and offer “what Moses commanded”
 - b. Sacrifices: two birds, two lambs
 - c. Washing: he shall “wash his clothes” and “bathe himself in water”

The Living Tradition

Origen of Alexandria: And why did [Jesus] touch him, since the law forbade the touching of a leper? He touched him to show that “all things are clean to the clean” (Titus 1:15). Because the filth that is in one person does not adhere to others, nor does external uncleanness defile the clean of heart. So he touches him in his untouchability, that he might instruct us in humility; that he might teach each of us that we should despise no one, or abhor them, or regard them as pitiable, because of some wound of their body or some blemish... So, stretching forth his hand to touch, the leprosy immediately departs... *Let us consider here, beloved, if there be anyone here that has the taint of leprosy in his soul, or the contamination of guilt in his heart? If he has, instantly adoring God, let him say: “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”* (Origen, *The Healing of the Leper*; translation in T. C. Oden and C. A. Hall, *Mark*, p. 26)

John Chrysostom: He touched the leper to signify that he heals not as servant but as Lord. For the leprosy did not defile his hand, but his holy hand cleansed the leprous body. (John Chrysostom, *The Gospel of St. Matthew*, 25.2; trans. in *NPNF1*, 10:173).

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (6th Sunday Ordinary Time, Year B)

1. What do you think it would have been like to be a leper in Old Testament times? Have you ever experienced an illness or infirmity that caused you to be “quarantined” from others? What was that like, and what light does it shed on the effects of sin?

2. If Lepers were supposed to go to *priests* to be declared clean, then what does the Leper’s words to Jesus reveal about who he thinks Jesus is? How is Jesus similar to and different from the priests in the book of Leviticus?

3 What is the significance of Jesus *cleansing* the leper rather than *contracting* leprosy? What does it reveal about the spiritual significance of this miracle for us today?

For Further Study

1. Mary Healy. *The Gospel of Mark* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).
2. Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, *Mark* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament II; Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 24-26.