



LIVING THE GOSPEL

**Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 11, 2024**

Theme: "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

Gathering Prayer

All: O God, who teach us that you abide in hearts that are just and true, grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace as to become a dwelling pleasing to you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Mark 1:40-45

⁴⁰A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." ⁴¹Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" ⁴²Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. ⁴³Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴"See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." ⁴⁵Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Gospel Focus

Our reactions to the leper in this story may be understandably mixed. On the one hand, he rewards Jesus' generosity with immediate disobedience, making Jesus' life harder. On the other hand, who could blame him? He has been seen, received, and loved in a way his disease made impossible. Jesus' willingness to stop and hear him, healed an ailment that should have been incurable. He has been the recipient of such love and such a wondrous gift that he cannot help but overflow in gratitude. When he approached Jesus to ask for healing, he likely was hoping to return to the life he had before the leprosy set in. He had been cast out from family and friends, from religious observance and social participation. But Jesus' healing disrupts all that. Instead of going to the priest and restoring his ritual cleanliness, he *has* to go out and preach what he has seen.

Gospel Reflection

Those who suffer chronic illness may experience themselves as being outside all of the usual spheres of human activity. As the workplace carries on without them and their family goes about its business, they can feel isolated, out of the loop, helpless to contribute to the daily activities, and left alone with their own suffering. While Christianity does not have regulations concerning ritual uncleanness and separation from sick persons, certain contagious conditions may require physical isolation. Even when this is not the case, many people avoid those with illness. It can seem to such a person that even God is keeping at a distance. The loneliness can be as bad as or worse than the illness itself.

In today's gospel, a person with leprosy leaves his prescribed separate space and reaches out for Jesus' help. He is tentative in his request: "If you wish, you can make me clean." Jesus responds with deep emotion. The verb *splanchnizomai*, usually translated "moved with compassion," literally means to "have a gut reaction"—that entrails. Ancient peoples considered the intestines as the seat of emotion. Mark's use of this strong verb emphasizes the depth of Jesus' feelings for the person with leprosy. Instead of recoiling from the man, Jesus reaches out his hand to him, touches him, and says how much he wants to be with the man and to see him "be made clean" and reintegrate into the heart of the life of the community. And so it happens.

Jesus' oneness with the person who had been ostracized because of his leprosy condition is emphasized at the end of the episode, when Jesus experiences an outsider status similar to that of the man who had been ill. Jesus "remained outside in deserted places," perhaps not only because of the crowds who kept coming to him but also because he deliberately sought to be in solidarity with those who were relegated to isolated places, offering them the compassion of God who does want to be one with them.

This gospel offers encouragement to those who suffer illness or disability, so that they may reach out in prayer to Jesus and to the believing community, to ask not only for compassion but also for incorporation of them and their gifts into the community of faith. Likewise, it reminds those who are well not to avoid or to relegate to the sidelines those who are ill or who have disabilities but to stretch out their hands to them, recognizing the gifts that they bring for spreading the gospel. At the end of today's gospel, the man who had leprosy proclaims the story everywhere. Some translations render the expression *keryssein ton logon* as "publicize the whole matter," but it literally says "preach the word."

There is a powerful word to be preached both by those who are well and by those who have an illness or disability? How have you experienced God's compassion through illness or disability? How do persons with chronic illness or disabilities proclaim the gospel in your faith community?

Old/New Testament and CCC links

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

¹ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ² "When anyone has a swelling or a rash or a bright spot on his skin that may become an infectious skin disease, he must be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons who is a priest.

⁴⁴ the man is diseased and is unclean. The priest shall pronounce him unclean because of the sore on his head. ⁴⁵ "The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' ⁴⁶ As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.

Responsorial Psalm — Psalms 32:1-2, 5, 11

R: *I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.*

Blessed is he whose fault is taken away, whose sin is covered.
Blessed the man to whom the Lord imputes not guilt,
in whose spirit there is no guile. **(R)**

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. **(R)**

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you just;
exult, all you upright of heart. **(R)**

Second Reading — 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

³¹So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ³²Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— ³³even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

¹Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Catechism of The Catholic Church

1504. Often Jesus asks the sick to believe.(Cf. Mk 5:34, 36; 9:23) He makes use of signs to heal: spittle and the laying on of hands,(Cf. Mk 7:32-36; 8:22-25) mud and washing.(Cf. Jn 9:6-7) The sick try to touch him, "for power came forth from him and healed them all."(Lk 6:19; cf. Mk 1:41; 3:10; 6:56) And so in the sacraments Christ continues to "touch" us in order to heal us.

2616. Prayer to Jesus is answered by him already during his ministry, through signs that anticipate the power of his death and Resurrection: Jesus hears the prayer of faith, expressed in words (the leper, Jairus, the Canaanite woman, the good thief)(Cf. Mk 1:40-41; 5:36; 7:29; Cf. Lk 23:39-43) or in silence (the bearers of the paralytic, the woman with a hemorrhage who touches his clothes, the tears and ointment of the sinful woman).(Cf. Mk 25; 5:28; Lk 7:37-38) The urgent request of the blind men, "Have mercy on us, Son of David" or "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" has-been renewed in the traditional prayer to Jesus known as the *Jesus Prayer*: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"(Mt 9:27, Mk 10:48) Healing infirmities or forgiving sins, Jesus always responds to a prayer offered in faith: "Your faith has made you well; go in peace."

St. Augustine wonderfully summarizes the three dimensions of Jesus' prayer: "He prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God. Therefore let us acknowledge our voice in him and his in us."(St. Augustine, En. in Ps. 85, 1: PL 37, 1081; cf. GILH 7)

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Sharing and Discussion

1. What have you learned from Jesus about being available and about helping others?
2. Was there a time when you felt that Jesus disrupted your plan? How did you respond?
3. The psalm reassures us the God is with us in troubled times and wants to bring us through them to a place of joy. How have you experienced God's love and compassion in times of trouble? How has your community helped you endure them?

Closing Prayer

All: Strengthen us, God of all goodness, with the recognition and compassion to respond to the needs of the world. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

**Living The Gospel bible study/sharing via Zoom.
Every Wednesday
Time: 8 – 9.30 pm**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2760073734?pwd=cDRZR2JQMGRobVkwY3ZVF5L1BwZz09>

**Meeting ID: 276 007 3734
Passcode: 1WordOfGod**

All are welcome!

For more information contact:

Mary Bay- 96965049 (marybay2468@gmail.com)

George Chee- 97399216 (georgejc@gmail.com)

References:

- (1) Gospel Notes are taken from The Navarre Bible
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