

## 6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE B

*Lev. 13: 1-2, 44-46 + Psalm 32: 1-2, 5,11 + 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1 + Mark 1:40-45*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: February 15, 2015

*“If you wish, you can make me clean.”*

The cry of the leper pierces Jesus’ heart, and in that cry, Jesus hears immense pain. Not just the physical pain the leper feels from this disease that eats away at his body, but a deeper pain.

For this man has been cut off from his loved ones, his contagious disease isolating him from the very ones he loves.

He lives outside of town with the other lepers, no longer able to feel the caring touch of his spouse nor to hold his children in his arms. Such overwhelming sorrow issues forth in this cry of despair to Jesus,

*“If you wish, you can make me clean.”*

No one in town comes within touching distance of this man, who has been commanded to keep people at a distance by shouting out, whenever he sees another human being, *“Unclean. Unclean.”* Stay Away! Stay Away!

But there is even a deeper hurt, for this leper, a suffering which he probably does not even want to face, and this is feeling cut off from God. For by the Jewish purity laws no leper can step into the temple to offer sacrifice to God, no leper can fulfill their religious duties to God.

The leper is unclean in the harshest sense of the word--- he is not even worthy of being touched by God, he feels abandoned by God.

The sight of this broken man, the sound of pain in his voice, the awareness of all these crushing levels of pain, affects Jesus physically. *“Moved with pity”* are the words used to express Jesus’ reaction, but the original Greek word --- *“splanchnizomai”*—conveys much better what happens to Jesus. *“Splanchnizomai”* means to be moved in one’s inmost parts, literally in one’s bowels. In other words, Jesus felt compassion in his guts, he is physically moved in the depth of his being by feeling the pain of the leper within himself.

Jesus is physically moved to do something for the leper in love. So Jesus stretches out his hand and touches this man who no one touches. In doing so, the leper who has felt cut off from others and from God, is re-connected and made whole, in body, mind, and spirit.

By touching someone who is unclean, Jesus not only cleanses his body of the leprosy but also grants him a deeper healing—communion once again with others and with God. By touching the untouchable one, Jesus assures the leper that no one, no matter what they have done or what illness they carry, that no one is beyond the loving touch of God.

Jesus does this throughout Mark's Gospel, reaches out to touch the untouchable ones in love, bringing them out of isolation, reconnecting them to others and to God. Last week we saw Jesus do this with Simon's mother-in-law, knocked off her feet by a fever, cut off from others by her sickness, unable to welcome Jesus to her home. When the disciples tell Jesus about her sickness, Jesus goes immediately to her bedside, and grasps her hand, and lifts her up, and the fever leaves her. No one wants to touch others who are sick for fear of catching what they have---Jesus, on the other hand, reaches out to these ones who suffer in isolation, and touches them.

Or take the encounter Jesus has with the deaf & mute man later in Mark's Gospel. (Ch.7) This man has been cut off from others and the world in general, because he is unable to hear, and because he cannot hear, he cannot speak of the desires of his heart. Jesus takes this man away from the crowd and touches him, putting his fingers in his ears, and spitting, touching his tongue. The very body parts that are broken are made whole by Jesus' touch, and this man, cut off from others because of his disease, can now hear for the first time the words, "*I love you*" and speak those words in return.

Pope Francis, throughout his almost 2 years as our spiritual leader, has been challenging us to touch the untouchable ones, to feel their pain, and to be moved to do something to ease their pain. In his homily addressed to the 20 newest Cardinals of our Church, Pope Francis challenged them to go out to those whom the world shuns, to those living on the outskirts of society. Last year on Holy Thursday Pope Francis went to a detention center where juvenile offenders were being held, cut off from the world and their loved ones, and he washed their feet. In doing so, the Pope said by his actions, "*If I can touch you in such a loving way, imagine how God wants to touch you in love and heal your deepest hurts.*"

As missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, we are invited by Him to reach out and touch others who feel cut off from the human community and from God. To recognize that we have the power within us, by the Spirit given to us, to be instruments of His healing touch.

This past Sunday afternoon, four of our Communion Ministers to the Homebound, Deacon Paul, and I visited our fellow parishioners who are confined to their homes because of illness or advancing age.

We celebrated the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick with them.

Part of that Sacrament is the laying on of hands, when the priest places his hands on the person's head and prays in silence.

At that time I invited those who had come with me on these visits, as well as family members of the homebound, to step forward and touch the person. As we together stretched forth our hands and touched our sister or brother who felt cut off from others because of their sickness, something palpable and powerful happened. A healing connection took place between them and us, as we, the Body of Christ, reached out in compassion to touch the suffering Body of Christ in them.

During the upcoming Lenten Season, we are called to such acts of charity, so that our hearts may expand in love of others.

We need to go before God in prayer and ask God to reveal to us who we are being called to touch in compassion, who God wants us to touch as an instrument of His Son's healing love.

There are people in nursing homes and hospitals and prisons who feel beyond the touch of God who are crying out to us, *"If you wish, you can make me clean.*

*You can be my connection to God, the bridge over these troubled waters of my life."*

There are people on the streets of Oklahoma City who need more than food and shelter—they need one person to place a hand on their shoulder and listen to their story in love.

There are members of our own families and of this parish family who have chosen to isolate themselves, who have made the decision to cut themselves off from this community of faith or from our own particular families.

What would happen if we made the effort to reach out to them?

Even if they rejected such an act of love, at the very least they would know they are not forgotten.

We can be moved to love in such a life-giving, healing way because we are touched by God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist.

Here we are touched by God in a bodily way as we consume the Lord's body and blood.

By doing so, we experiencing healing physically, emotionally, and spiritually--on all levels of who we are the Lord comes to us in love and touches whatever parts of us we consider unclean, beyond the touch of God.

The message is loud and clear---the Lord Jesus Christ wills our healing, longs to assure us that though we may feel alone or abandoned by God, He is always with us.

*Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi*