

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
FEBRUARY 11, 2024**

SCRIPTURES:

**Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46
1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1
Mark 1:40-45**

**Those in sin are separated from the community.
Everything we do must be for God's glory.
Jesus heals us and restores us to community.**

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel, since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faith community and does not necessarily answer any questions that an individual may have. We simply ask, "What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear?" We listen to the word with that question in mind.

Mark:

The Evangelist, Mark, introduces us to the very heart of the Gospel message: Jesus Christ has come to break through the power of sin and evil and to usher in healing and salvation. All barriers, even the most sacred, must be broken down. Confronting evil in its very face - naming a sin, touching a leper - becomes the first act of divine power leading to healing and wholeness. Ultimately, Jesus will stand up even to death itself on the cross and break through to life on the other side of death.

Jesus knows very well that he will incur legal defilement if he touches the leper. He will be considered "unclean," excluded from the fellowship of the community just like the leper. Jesus does not hesitate to identify with the outcast. He reaches out to this person in his isolation and exclusion. By reaching out, Jesus bridges the chasm of loneliness, fear, despair, and rage into which the leper has been cast.

Jesus even dares to confront the sacred Law of Moses in order to reach out and touch the man with leprosy. Even the most sacred must give way to the power of the Son of God.

However, Jesus proves that he has no scorn for the Law of Moses: he sends the man to the priest for verification of the healing. In addition, he is unwilling to accept false glory that might come from his miracles; he reserves that for the time of authentic glory that will come after his Passion and death.

The most remarkable and extraordinary feature of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ consists in the fact that he invites us to become his disciples, to become like him, to reproduce his values in our lives, to do his works, to become "other Christs" to one another and to the whole world. Discipleship is our first calling or primary destiny. We sit at the feet of the Divine Master; it is our privilege to internalize the values and standards of his life.

We cannot do better than the Master. We face up to sin; we call it by name. We touch the less welcome dimensions of our lives, and we ask Jesus to touch them also. Jesus cannot forgive us if we do not present our sinful lives to him.

Leviticus:

This book from the Law of Moses was written as a book of instructions for the Levites who were hereditary servants of God at the Temple in Jerusalem. It contains rules and regulations meant to assure their worthiness as God's special servants. Spiritual cleanliness was manifested by bodily cleanliness. No blemish of any kind was permitted in the heart or on the body of anyone serving in the Temple. Skin diseases were considered particularly loathsome. Persons with such skin diseases were excluded from the fellowship of those who worshipped God. Often the rabbis in later ages came to diagnose the ailment of lepers as a spiritual disease. They were sinners. They, and those who had contact with them, were considered unfit for God's service. Cleansing a leper was considered to be close to rescuing a person from death.

1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians brings to a close a long section on the relationship between personal freedom and communal responsibility. In the end, for Christians, the governing principle needs to be whatever leads to the glory of God. There can be no barriers to the Gospel. Our personal advantages must be subordinated to the needs that others have for salvation. "We are nothing," Paul would say. "Christ is everything!"

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who are the "lepers" of our society today? Who are people we would not want to be seen with? People who speak with a "foreign" accent? Those who walk with leg and arm supports in the supermarket? Those who use an EBT card at the checkout counter? The "other racial" boyfriend your daughter brings home from college?

2. Tell the story of how liberating you found it to be for yourself when you were able to overcome the prejudices you grew up with in your life. Recount the freedom you found when you accepted people the way God has accepted them. Tell what bondage you found when you harbored prejudices of any kind.

3. Do you dare to come to Jesus and to expose to him the "unclean" parts of your life that need to be forgiven by him? Do you even acknowledge that you do have some unclean parts of your soul? Do you think he will be down on you and not acknowledge you as part of his family? Have you asked for forgiveness recently?

PRAYER

**“Raise me up, Lord. Do not abandon your servant.
I want health that I may sing to you
and help your people live holy lives.
I plead with you.
You are my strength.
Do not desert me.
I have grown weak amid the storm
but I long to return to you.”**

St. Gregory Nazianzus (329-389)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The cross of crucifixion happens to be one of the most frequently denied realities of Christian life. The cross stands at the very core of Christian experience. Yet, we do not readily want to face up to that reality. In practice, most of us deny the necessity of dying before we can rise again. Suffering is hard to accept: to embrace it as a power that leads to liberation. We avoid the cross at almost any cost. We would come to salvation without having to climb the hill of Calvary with Jesus.

A man with a skin disease approached Jesus. To do so was absolutely forbidden by the Law of Moses. To come near a rabbi was to attract additional rejection, surely. But, after years of rejection and isolation, one more condemnation surely would mean more pain. He was perhaps so familiar with the land of death already that he could risk another blow to his self-esteem. He was as good as dead already. So, why not confront this pain one more time?

Jesus can sense this do-or-die bravado in the man. Jesus knows that there is no more false pride left in him. He is utterly empty of his own power. Inside this emptiness and powerlessness, there sure is room for the power of God. There is no obstacle in the man now. The power of God will not be blocked out. The man has surrendered to death. Now, he can begin to live.

Surrendering to God in our own lives requires that we feel some emptiness within the self. If we are self-sufficient or filled with pride or if we have too much of this world's goods, there can be no room for God. Powerlessness makes us ready to receive the power of God. If we have too much power on our own, God cannot find a place within us.

There are times when God will make himself a place within us by emptying us of whatever blocks his way. God will find a way of making room for himself and for his power.

We may be reduced to powerlessness one way or the other. The addict knows that God will find room for himself. We may be reduced to utter powerlessness by the effects of our addiction. When we have nothing left, God will come with power to help us.

The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous teach us that there must be a felt sense of powerlessness in us before we come “to believe that God can restore us to sanity.” To be filled with pride leaves no room for God.

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.”

The Catechism: #602-603, 599-601

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