



**Blessed Sacrament Parish**  
**Homily by Father Chris Comerford**  
**February 11, 2018 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Reading I Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46**

**Psalm 32:1-2, 5-11**

**Reading II 1 Corinthians 10:31, 11:1**

**Gospel Mark 1:40-45**

**Homily**

You really feel for people who suffer from skin diseases. It is right out there where people can see this disease. It is hard to hide. Often when we have something inside, nobody knows. But with a skin disease — everybody knows. And leprosy, Hansen's disease as we came to know it, was about the worst. That was because of it being so highly contagious, and because there was no real cure or treatment that led to death. But it also involved so much more. We see that in our Gospel tonight. We see Jesus's encounter with this leper. All of this is still in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel. Do you realize that? All of these readings we have had this past month are still from Chapter One. A lot has already happened, and Jesus is beginning to show what his public ministry is going to be like.

We saw a healing of Peter's mother-in-law last week, and now the leper. The healing of leprosy was extremely rare. And we see what it cost. We see this in how the leper addresses Jesus. "If you wish you could make me clean." The opposite of clean is dirty or impure. That wasn't from the disease. The disease led to that in terms of the ritual impurity that would affect the Jewish people in such a great way. So what happened to someone with leprosy? We heard about that in Leviticus. You had to let the priest examine you and then the priest said, "You have to live outside the community. You have to stay away from everyone, including your family. You cannot enter the temple to worship. And if anyone comes near you, you must say, 'Unclean. Unclean.'" They had to cut their hair, shave their head, and keep their beard very short — all the things that were different from their culture. This separated them and marked them completely. But probably the biggest difference was that they could never worship God in the way they were supposed to. They could never go to the temple and offer sacrifice. Thus, they would see themselves as not being in line with what God wants.

"If you wish you can make me clean," said the leper. What a request that he gives to Jesus. And Jesus is moved with pity the Gospel says. His heart feels for this man who suffers so much. And he does the unthinkable. He touches him. "I do will it," Jesus said. "Be made clean." And as Mark shows us, when Jesus says something, it happens when? Immediately. Immediately he was made clean. Incredible. Did Jesus have to touch him? No. There are many cases throughout the Scriptures where all Jesus did was say

something and the person was cured. But I think in this case Jesus knew it was important. This man received no touch from anyone. And Jesus offers that. Even though, according to law, Jesus should not touch that man unless he would get the disease and be made unclean.

But not when you encounter holiness. When you encounter the holiness of Jesus, the person being healed is the one transformed. So you see that Jesus is offering the healing — but it doesn't stop there because he knows the man needs more and says, "Go and show yourself to the priests and offer the sacrifice that Moses has taught us to do." We heard that in Leviticus today. And that would be proof.

Jesus is allowing the leper to be restored to the community, restored to the life of worship. Incredible. And it is interesting that the leper approaches Jesus. Who do you approach for the sign of healing? The priest. In a sense it is showing the connectedness to Jesus as the high priest who offers him back to healing. Jesus only asks one thing, "Don't tell anybody." You notice that, Jesus does that a lot and says, "Don't tell anybody." You kind of wonder why. Why doesn't he want it publicized? Is it reverse psychology? We play that game, don't we? We say, "You better not tell anybody." And then we want it told, it is kind of the reverse. That is what happens. The leper who has been healed publicizes it everywhere. Everybody knows. And what happens? It was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly — so he stays in deserted places. What does that sound like? That is what the leper had to do before he was cured — stay away from the community and away in deserted places.

Jesus has taken on what he healed this man of. He is the one who has to stay away now. Incredible. Jesus does that for us, he takes on our burdens, our sufferings. It is what the cross shows for us, he took it all. Incredible how he did that, and amazing the healing that he offers. Think of the people who struggle from being ostracized today. We do not do it as much today, but it happens. I was watching TV today and there was a report about when Magic Johnson had the HIV virus. People were afraid to be near him. I forgot how intense that was. We didn't know. We didn't know much about that disease. I am thankful there is treatment today and we have a better understanding of the HIV virus. That is the closest I could think of to leprosy today, where people would be shunned out of fear.

But Jesus overcomes that. Jesus changes that so we can turn to him. We may not have the physical disease but most of us have some kind of sin in our hearts that is a spiritual leprosy. It may have even divided us. It makes us feel separated from the community and church, maybe from our family or others. Sin can do that to us. And what does Jesus tell us to do? Go show yourself to the priest. The sacrament of reconciliation. It will restore you spiritually the way Jesus restored the leper physically. We can receive that restoration by being absolved of our sins. What a gift. How many of us see it as a gift? Not too many. Maybe it is something to think about doing during Lent, especially if we have been separated because of something serious going on in our lives. Pray about that.

Pray about that. To be honest with you, I have a lot of free time in the confessional right now. I am not too busy. I hope that changes during Lent, I really do. It is a good time to get back to that practice.

Let's ask for that that healing. Let's ask that Jesus can make us clean. Only he can do so, and those he has given that power and authority to do so. We pray for that strength, we pray for that healing, we pray for the sense of knowing the God who loves us so much.

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