

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(2 Kings 5:14-17 / Luke 17:11-19)
09.10.2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today in our countries, **leprosy** is an illness which has disappeared. But this does not mean that leprosy no longer exists in the world. Far from it. There are still many countries which are fighting against the ill of leprosy.

Does the fact that leprosy has disappeared from among us mean that today's gospel passage is no longer relevant? If we read this gospel passage attentively, we learn that lepers lived apart and were not allowed to mix with other people. They were marginalized, isolated, excluded from life in society. In this sense, forms of leprosy still exist in our countries too.

Let us take a few examples:

Sin is a spiritual sickness which excludes us from communion with God and communion with the Church and even with the world. If I kill with a gun, if I kill with my tongue or with my poisonous pen, if I kill in my heart, in every one of these cases, I create a distance between myself and society at large.

There are **physical or mental diseases** which fill some people with acute fear. Onlookers can hold contempt or disdain in their minds and hearts for sufferers from these sicknesses, and so many who are mentally ill are made suffer all the more by being excluded from social life.

There are so many people who are **addicted** to alcohol or drugs of all kinds and, as a result, they live apart in an unreal world,

There are young people who discover their **sexual identity** and don't know what to do with it. They don't want to speak about it because they fear they will not be understood and even rejected. As a result, they isolate themselves. Sometimes, they even take their own lives through suicide.

We could continue the enumeration of alienating sicknesses. All those people who marginalize, isolate or exclude themselves from social life for the various reasons I have mentioned and yet others still, and all those who are rejected by society at large for the same reasons are the lepers of our day. And it can happen that we are one of the excluded or again counted among those who make lepers of others, by our exclusion of them.

In today's gospel passage, we see ten lepers who called out to Jesus: "take pity on us", be **merciful** to us. The Lord never refuses to show mercy if we ask Him. Jesus is always ready to transform those situations of death in which we find ourselves into situations of life. Jesus is always ready to offer us a share in his resurrection already in the here and now. With Jesus' mercy, miracles do happen.

Here too, let us take an example. Most of us have heard about the Centre of rehabilitation for alcoholics run by Sr Concilio in Newry. Alcoholics arrive there in despair and, by God's grace and mercy and through their good will and other people's care and encouragement, they engage themselves in a long and difficult process of healing. At the end, for a lot of them, what results is nothing less than a miracle, a resurrection. They

leave the Centre filled with joy and strength, ready to work again and reinforced by a deep relationship with the Lord through prayer. They were dying. They are alive. This is a new life which opens for them and their family. Jesus healed ten lepers. Jesus' ministry of healing continues today in our midst. There is no situation in life which cannot be touched by the Lord's mercy if only we ask for it. The ten lepers were healed. We can be healed. There is no situation which is beyond the Lord's redeeming grace.

Today's gospel passage tells us that only one out of the ten healed lepers came **to give thanks** to the Lord and that he was a stranger, a Samaritan. There is a precious lesson here for our life of prayer. In prayer, we know how to ask the Lord for his help but, if we are honest, we have to recognize that most of the time we forget to thank Him for his blessings. To be thankful does not come naturally to many of us. When we were young, how many times did we not hear our parents say to us: "What do you say now?" "Thank you, Mum" or "Thank you, Dad". Gratitude really is a question of justice. To take everything for granted is not just, especially in our daily lives, at home, at work, in friendship. Presumably, the nine lepers who were cured and did not come to thank Jesus were Jews. It would have been easy for them to come back and thank Jesus. But for the Samaritan to come back to Jesus was more demanding: we know that Samaritans had no dealings with Jews and vice versa. The call for us today is a call to express gratitude, and to do this especially in our daily lives. A word of thanks can change the life of the one who hears the expression of our appreciation.

Perhaps we don't agree with and may even be ready to condemn the nine healed lepers who did not come to thank the Lord and yet we fail to be grateful ourselves. Let me propose a little test: Some time today, we might take a sheet of paper and write on it nine blessings which the Lord has bestowed upon us and for which we have not given Him specific thanks. This would be a good way to put some perspective into our judgment of the ingratitude of others.

Lord, help us to identify our leprosy. In your great mercy, come to heal us. Fill our hearts with thankfulness.