

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(Leviticus 13:1-2. 44-46 / Mark 1:40-45)
11.02.2018

Dear brothers and sisters,

Who was that leper whom Jesus cured in today's gospel? Was he just a man who happened to be at the right place and at the right time when Jesus passed by that way? Was this healing miracle simply one among many others which reveal that Jesus was the Messiah?

To answer that question, it is useful to put into context the meaning of the word "leprosy" in the bible. The word "leprosy" referred not only to the sickness that we call "leprosy" today. It referred to a variety of skin diseases which, when they spread over the body, made the person contagious and impure, someone to avoid at any cost. The tragedy of these lepers was not mainly the physical effects of the disease on their bodies, but the shame and humiliation of being regarded and shunned as dirty and repulsive. Lepers generated fear all around them. They were isolated, totally marginalized: they could not marry and have children, or participate in any kind of social life. Lepers were separated from the community not only for fear of contagion, but also because they were seen as impure and might contaminate the holy people of God. A cruel prescription, of which we were reminded in the first reading from the book of Leviticus, was imposed upon lepers: "The person infected with leprosy shall cover his upper lip and cry out 'unclean, unclean'. As long as the disease lasts, he must be unclean; and therefore he must live apart; he must live outside the camp". The leper's greatest anguish was that he might never be able to return to his community of life and faith.

Let us come back to our initial question. Just who was that leper whom Jesus cured? This leper was not only the man who happened to be standing at the right place at the right time when Jesus passed by that way, that leper is also each one of us when we find ourselves in a situation of isolation, that is to say distanced or even separated from God, our neighbour and ourselves. To live is to be in relationship, to be in relationship with God, with others and with ourselves. When we are tempted to withdraw ourselves from all relationship with others, or when we are ignored by others, shunned, estranged by them, we become like a leper... we become the leper of the gospel passage listened to this morning. This path of isolation is a path which leads to death. Jesus is the prince of life and wants to cure us so that we may be able to engage ourselves anew on the path of life. This is God's will. God is Trinity, that is to say a relationship of persons. We were created in his image and are called to live in relationship with others. The good news of the kingdom of God is that Jesus, on behalf of his heavenly Father, comes to restore our broken relationships and to heal us of all that isolates us and makes of us real lepers.

When we become aware of our leprosy and begin to suffer from it, we want to be cured. So we ask the Lord to cure us. But what is the level of our trust in Jesus? Do we ask the Lord to cure us without much conviction? Or do we ask him to cure us with the strength of an unshakeable trust in his desire for our well-being? Have you noticed in today's gospel the way the leper spoke to Jesus: "A leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his knees: If you want to, he said, you can cure me". This man displayed great faith in Jesus. The strength of the leper's request is amazing. What is the strength of our request when we ask the Lord for a grace of healing? It is sure that

God could cure us independently of our trust in him, but he respects our liberty and so he needs our collaboration and the expression of our indefectible trust in him to cure us.

“Feeling sorry for the leper, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him: Of course I want to cure you! He said: Be cured”. At the prayer of the leper, Jesus was filled with compassion. Jesus came into the world to reveal God’s compassion for his people; his love is a quasi maternal love for his children, for each one of us. So, out of compassion, Jesus cured the leper. Jesus cured the leper by touching him. Just as Jesus touched the leper, something which was forbidden to do by the Law, he reintegrated him into society. Jesus not only cured the leper from his physical illness, but he cured him also from his social ostracism which was an even greater ill.

Today, the message for us is to acknowledge that it happens that we isolate ourselves or find ourselves isolated, at least for a while, from God, others and ourselves. With trust let us ask the Lord to come to cure us, to re-establish us in life, to restore us to communion with one another. He wants to do this for us. He wants us to be fully alive and in relationship with each other. This is the good news of the kingdom of God among us.