



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **6th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B**

***If you want to, you can cure me***

*Readings: Leviticus 13: 1-2, Ps 31, 1 Corinthians 10: 31-11:1, Mark 1: 40-45*

Leprosy is a long-term bacterial infection. Initially leprous infections are without symptoms and may remain this way for 5 to 20 years. When symptoms finally develop they cause damage to nerves, lung, skin and eyes. This leads to disfigurement and an inability to feel pain leading to loss of parts of extremities by repeated injuries or infection. Leprosy is spread by cough or nasal fluid between people. Contrary to popular belief, it is not highly contagious.

In our time, thanks to massive aid work, it is mostly under control. In Biblical times and for most of Man's history up until now, it has been a long running and incurable curse. Certainly, like most illness, it was often seen as an indicator of spiritual disorder and, in the Holy Scripture, in addition to its terrifying physical reality, it was seen as a metaphor for sin.

It is for this reason that Mother Church presents us with these readings on the eve of the great penitential season of Lent.

With the exception of Jesus Christ Our Lord and, by her Immaculate Conception, His Blessed Mother, all mortals subsequent to Adam and Eve have the bacterium of Original Sin in their spiritual DNA. It is a given of Fallen Man. The symptoms may emerge quickly or slowly but emerge they will.

The reality of our human sinfulness has many parallels with the leprous state. Unacknowledged and untreated the bacterium of sin eats away at our soul. It is a progressive illness. It works away quietly, hidden, unseen, undermining our spiritual health and making us invalids on the pilgrim way. In the same way although it is not severely contagious the pattern of our behaviours can affect and infect those around us.

The long term effect of sin is that, like leprosy, it is profoundly disfiguring of the potential beauty and God-imaged humanity of the soul. Sin makes us ugly and we do not like to look at our faces in the mirror of Christ. It damages our sight. Used to the familiar pattern of sin in our lives we become blind to its reality in ourselves and more likely to fail to see it either in our society or the moral dilemmas with which we are presented.

Inured to our sinfulness, hardened by the repeated pattern of our condition, we can become insensitive to the point where we no longer even sense the damage being done.

The leper is an outcast. This could not happen to us! But nonetheless sin can make us very lonely people. What would the world think if they knew what I was really like?

I was preaching at another church a year or so back on the subject of sin. Two men, independent of one another, came to tell me that if I preached on sin again in their church, they would withhold their giving! If they had stripped stark naked on the spot they could not have given me a clearer insight into the state of their being. St John tells us that anyone who says he is without sin is a liar and the truth is not in him. Darkness always tries to overtake the light.

Sin, like leprosy, excludes, isolates, eats away, infects, threatens, damages and disfigures the human soul. That is the bad news.

It is such a huge problem that God Himself came to solve it and heal us and restore us. That is the Good News. The Incarnation of Christ and His Cross on the Calvary are the remedy. By taking on our humanity in His divinity He has destroyed the bacterium of sin. Man is not without hope. He is not doomed to progressive disintegration and destruction.

Thus the holy season of Lent brings us face to face with our fallen nature – not because it wants us to celebrate our sinfulness or rehearse our manifold failures BUT.... because in acknowledging the reality of our human condition we are better placed to embrace the cure with joyful hearts. With the hopeful leper we can approach Jesus confident of His loving mercy. We need hide nothing from Him. He sees our distress. He has compassion on our wounds. He does not hide His face from our disfigurement. We have only to come.

And the glory is that He has, in His Church, provided that place of the healing of the deepest hurts that we have suffered or inflicted on ourselves. That is the confessional, the sacramental centre of our

reconciliation with God. The place where, by the authority of Jesus mediated through His apostles, we are made whole again. Therein we make the trusting leper's request , *'If you want to, you can cure me'* and therein we hear Jesus' reply, *'Of course I want to. Be cured.'* And, in that place of profound mercy, where the blood shed on the Cross is given for you, Jesus reaches out to touch us more deeply than we can know and encourages us. *'Go and show yourself to the priest.'*

Use Lent to be utterly real with God. Use the confessional as the encounter with the transforming Christ and, with the healed leper, tell of His glory in your life.

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