

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 11

1 Corinthians 10:31 – 11:1

Mark 1:40-45

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 11, 2024



REFLECTION

In Jesus' culture, leprosy was a serious disease. It represented various skin diseases. A person with leprosy was ritually unclean and had to be separated from society. They were essentially cut off from their community, unable to be with friends or family, be part of the worshipping community, or even obtain basic needs. Anyone who touched a leper would also be considered unclean and separated.

Today there are cures for leprosy (known as Hansen's disease), but we still experience separation at times from important relationships in our lives. This separation can be caused by many things, like sin or arguments. It might be physical separation, that you have moved away from a loved one. In all of these, it feels tremendously painful to be cut off from those you love. Isolation and quarantine during the pandemic taught us that we need to be connected to be whole.

This is why Jesus' healing is so powerful. He not only restores the leper's health but allows him to rejoin his community. Jesus' touch shows that the man belongs. In Jesus, we are made whole in all aspects of our being. He heals our brokenness and restores us to live the life he has made for us: a life full of love, for God and others.



QUESTIONS

❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?

❖ What area of your life needs Jesus' loving presence?

❖ Who are the outcasts that are unnoticed in your community?

How can you bring healing?



ACTION

Sometimes we can feel like outcasts. Reflect on your life and where you feel cut off from God's love. Think about your emotional health, your social life, and your spiritual wellbeing. In what areas do you need God's loving presence? Think about others in your spheres of influence. Who is cut off from you? Bring them to God in prayer.



Learn about St. Damien of Molokai, patron saint of people with leprosy. <https://www.catholichawaii.org/catholic-essentials/saints-traveling-relics/history-of-hawaiis-saints/saint-damien/>



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SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #77B

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Mark 1:40-45

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

In biblical times, leprosy was not curable and those who suffered from it were treated as social outcasts to avoid spreading the disease. According to the law, a leper was not allowed to approach the villages or towns, and was often forced to live in a leper colony. If someone came into contact with a leper, he was also considered unclean. Jesus could have cured the leper simply with a word, yet he *touches* the leper and makes him clean. What it would have been like to the leper to be touched! Not only does Jesus offer physical healing, he directs the leper to go to the priest to be reinstated into the community. In this Jesus also heals him of social isolation and gives him the gift of community. We reflect today on the attitude the leper has when he approaches Jesus, and how we can do the same in our prayer life.

Q FOCUS: *Trust in Jesus' plan for our healing.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

Lent begins this week on February 14, Ash Wednesday. It will last until we celebrate Easter on March 31. During this penitential season, Catholics traditionally focus on three distinct spiritual exercises that prepare the soul to enter more deeply into the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These three practices of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving help us rid our lives of those distractions that keep us from Jesus, increase the quantity and quality of time spent with him, and encourage our hearts to grow through

the virtues of charity and generosity. Spend some time reflecting on what you can give up, how to increase your prayer life, and in what ways you can give of your time, talent, and treasure.

Church Teaching Connection

"All that is done and said by this man, who was considered unclean, is an expression of his faith! . . . The supplication of the leper demonstrates that when we present ourselves to Jesus it is not necessary to make long speeches. A few words are enough, provided that they are accompanied by complete trust in his omnipotence and in his goodness. Entrusting ourselves to God's will in fact means remitting ourselves to his infinite mercy" (Pope Francis, General Audience, June 22, 2016).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 1:40-45

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean." The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once.

He said to him, "See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them."

The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

The leper in today's Gospel approaches Jesus and before saying a word kneels down before him. This first detail of the Gospel passage might be often overlooked because we focus more on the miraculous healing that takes place. However, the posture and attitude the leper takes before Jesus can teach us many things.

► What do you think the leper's posture means? What does it say about the leper's attitude and his understanding of Jesus?

► How do you approach Jesus? What kind of spiritual and physical posture can you take when you pray?

In general, the posture of kneeling communicates an attitude of respect and honor toward the person or object we are kneeling before. It can also signify humility and deference. The posture of kneeling is also commonly associated with praying. As Catholics, we are familiar with kneeling because we kneel during certain parts of the Mass. In today's Gospel, the leper's posture before Jesus signifies his respect for Jesus and his humility before him. It also can

signify his deference to Jesus since he is begging him to be healed.

When someone had leprosy, they were isolated from the community. This practice was practical—it prevented others from contracting the disease. However, it also set these people apart socially from their families and faith communities, no contact allowed. They were stigmatized and looked down upon. It makes sense that the leper would approach Jesus with this posture. He knew he was an outcast, yet he still dared to approach Jesus.

The leper's request to Jesus also shows this attitude of humility and reverence for the power of Christ. Rather than demanding to be healed, he simply says, "If you wish, you can make me clean." This can be a powerful prayer that anyone can use as we approach Jesus in prayer. It is an attitude that we also hear in other prayers in our tradition. For example, the beginning of the leper's request, "If you wish," reminds us of the part in the Our Father where we say, "thy will be done." Trusting and embracing God's will, and not relying solely on our own, is an essential and fundamental part of our Christian life, but it is not always easy for us.

Only after making this statement of faith does the leper ask to be made clean (if it is God's will).

► What are some things that need healing in your life or in the world? How can you incorporate those requests for healing into your prayer time?

► When you pray that God's will be done, do you really mean it? Why might some people struggle with putting all their trust in God?

► What are some ways young people can increase their trust in God?

When Jesus heard the leper's request, he was moved with pity and cured him of the disease. Jesus wants to do the same for the situations we face. He wants to enter into our situation and express his compassion and love for us. When we experience this love and compassion of Christ, we should be like the leper and share the news of Jesus' work in our lives with the world!

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 132.

Be aware of how you approach Jesus in prayer. Sometimes our physical posture can help our spiritual posture.

Jesus wants to heal you.

Trust in God's will even if it is different than yours, knowing that God works good for those who trust in him.

Act on the Word

Compare, Contrast, and Meditate

For this activity, you will need Bibles, paper and pens, a journal or paper for personal journaling, and meditative music.

The miracle of the cleansing of the leper is found in all three synoptic Gospels: Matthew 8:1–4, Mark 1:40–45 (today's Gospel), and Luke 5:12–16. This activity will help the teens come to a better understanding of the passage by comparing and contrasting the different accounts.

Divide the teens into small groups and give the groups paper and pens and Bibles. Have them carefully examine each of the accounts of this story and then make a list of the similarities and differences they find when reading the passages. After all the groups have had enough time to read, discuss, and write, have one member from each group share their lists with the larger group.

When all the groups have finished presenting, invite the teens to spend some time in private prayer, reflecting or journaling about this encounter between Jesus and the leper. Have the students spread out to minimize talking and distractions. You might want

to play some meditative music during this reflection time. Before they begin their prayer time, offer the following questions to the teens as a way to guide their prayer. They do not have to use these questions, but they might inspire deeper reflection.

- ✱ Imagine you are the leper in this story. But instead of leprosy, there is something else that is ailing you. What is it? What is that thing in your life that is most crippling to you (it can be physical, spiritual, emotional, or relational)?
- ✱ What do you want Jesus to heal in your life? Ask him for healing. Imagine you are standing before Christ and repeat the words, "If you wish, you can make me clean."
- ✱ End your prayer with thanksgiving for God's will and declaring your trust in his divine providence by saying, "Jesus, I trust in you."

Closing Prayer

*Jesus our healer,
give us the courage to approach you when
we feel we have nothing to offer you.*

*Lift us up
so that we may again rejoice
and praise your goodness,
for you live and reign with God the Father
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.