

Homily – Mark 1: 40-45
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
13th, 14th February 2021 - Sooeey

Professor Henry Mitchell wrote about a time when his wife was recovering from a critical illness. He approached the doctor to thank him for his attentiveness and care for his wife Ella. The doctor's response amazed him. The doctor said, "First of all, give God the praise. Then thank the people for their fervent prayers. Then, maybe, I come in somewhere on down the line." Henry Mitchell thought this was unusual modesty, and maybe even undue modesty, to which the doctor replied that he was just being honest. "You see," he said, "we doctors don't ever heal anybody. We may be effective in removing obstacles to healing, such as infections, but the actual healing process is not ours to control. It is God who heals"

Well, in the Gospel of today, we are presented with Jesus healing a leper. The leper seems to be so desperate. He comes to Jesus, kneels in front of Him and pleads: "Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean". And the response of Jesus is quite sudden and certain. And He says: "Of course, I do will it, be made clean". And the leper immediately is healed.

Leprosy is often translated as an infectious skin disease. Sadly enough, lepers were considered unclean and were kept isolated from the Society. But, with leprosy largely eradicated, none of us is likely to bump into a leper any time soon. And yet, the whisper that goes within all of us whenever we hear this familiar story from the Bible could be, that we need to keep away from those people who have such an unsightly physical deformity.

It is said, that St. Francis of Assisi, at one time in his life was terribly afraid of lepers. Then, one day when he was out for a walk, he heard the warning bell that the lepers were required to ring in the Middle Ages. Francis saw a horribly disfigured leper emerging from a clump of trees. Half of his nose had been eaten away; his hands were stubs without fingers and his lips were oozing white pus. This time, instead of giving into his fears, Francis ran forward, embraced the leper and kissed him. Francis' life was never the same after that episode. He had found a new relationship with God, a new sensitivity to others and a new energy for his ministry. He had in fact received the touch of the Lord by embracing that leper.

Well, the healing of the man with leprosy described in the Gospel of today is just one instance of the mystery of salvation taking place through Jesus Christ, just one

more illustration of God proving that He is mercy and love.

When the leper in the Gospel approached Jesus with deep faith and implored him saying: “Lord, if you want to, you can cure me”, Jesus responded immediately from the heart: “Of course, I want to, be cured”. Well, Jesus didn’t forsake the man, He didn’t turn His back on Him, He didn’t ignore Him. Instead, He acted promptly because He knew how lonely, how miserable, how forsaken this man was.

There is a story about a New York City policeman investigating a case. Dialing a phone number on Day One of the investigation, he somehow knew before he had even finished that he’d made a mistake. The phone rang once, twice – then someone picked it up. “You’ve got the wrong number!” a husky male voice snapped before the line went dead. Mystified, the policeman hit redial. “I said you got the wrong number!” came the voice. Once more the phone clicked down. “How could he possibly know I had the wrong number?” the policeman asked himself. A cop is trained to be curious and concerned. So he dialed a third time. “Hey, c’mon,” the voice said. “Is this you again?” “Yea, it’s me. I was wondering how you knew I had the wrong number

before I even said anything.” “You figure it out!” The phone slammed down.

He sat there for a while, the receiver hanging loosely in his fingers. He called the man back. “Did you figure it out yet?” the man asked. “The only thing I can think of is nobody ever calls you.” “You got it!” The phone went dead for the fourth time. Chuckling, the officer dialed the man back. “What do you want now?” asked the man. “I thought I’d call – just to say hello.” “Hello? Why?” “Well, if nobody ever calls you, I thought maybe I should.” There may be nobody else in this world that is moved with compassion enough to reach out to you.

Well, there are people all around us who live isolated lives. And sometimes the only one we have to rely on is God Himself — God Who dials our number and says, “I thought I’d call – just to say hello,” . Yes, our God is a God, Who brings joy to the sorrowful, peace to the troubled, and healing to the sick, a God, who embraces the lonely in the shadow of His wings, Who fills the empty, and Who guides those who are without hope.

I remember reading a touching story from the life of Mother Teresa while I was a student of philosophy in 1995. The story goes thus: One day, one of the sisters belonging to the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters

of Charity of Mother Teresa was cleaning the wounds of a leper lying on the streets of Calcutta. As she was bandaging the wounds of this leper, a Moslem (Maulvi) priest happened to pass that way. Well! The Moslem priest saw this sister nursing the wounds of the disfigured man with much care. And he couldn't believe his eyes. He was totally moved and thus exclaimed: "Till today, I thought your Jesus is only a mere prophet. But, if your Jesus is able to move you and inspire you to be so compassionate towards this wounded man, he is not merely a prophet, but God Himself".

Remember dear brothers and sisters, when the Lord touches you and me, as He did touch the leper in the Gospel, our lives will never be the same. The touch of the Lord transforms every person. And, that gentle and healing touch of the Lord, is an invitation to each of us to be compassionate to everyone we come across in our life. He invites us to reach out to the deprived and the outcasts of the society. For Jesus Christ, compassion was not a mere feeling; it was a commitment to get involved with the wounded. During this Mass, let us ask the Lord to make us compassionate and thus enable us to reach out to the wounded, to the lonely, to the sick and to the deprived. God bless you all, **Amen.**

