

11<sup>th</sup> February 2018 (Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Leviticus 13:1-2,44-46; Psalm 31(32):1-2,5,11; 1Corinthians 10:31-11:1; Mark 1:40-45.

### **If you want to, you can heal me!**

Today's gospel reading provides us with a very interesting introduction to the season of Lent which we start this Wednesday. Jesus is approached by a leper asking to be healed, Jesus heals the leper and as a consequence Jesus himself has to stay away from towns and villages!

In order to better appreciate this short reading, we need to take in the details of the first reading from the book of Leviticus. In the Old Testament and at the time of Jesus it was feared that all skin disease was highly contagious. To protect the community, anyone with any form of skin disease was isolated from the community, wear torn clothes, keep his head uncovered and shout: unclean (keep away from me!) This is total isolation from family, friends and any type of community. Moreover, anyone who touched a leper, became himself unclean.

In the gospel story this leper breaks the law and approaches Jesus; he believes that Jesus has the power to heal him. The leper goes to Jesus, kneels in front of him and prays; actions one only does in front of God. In the Old Testament we are told that only God could heal a leper; this leper has faith in Jesus is from God.

Jesus reaches out, touches the leper and heals him but then orders him not to tell anyone about this. Jesus knew that his popularity would cost him his life. The healed leper returns to the community preaching about Jesus' healing and as a consequence Jesus is no longer free to go openly into any town, but has to stay in places where nobody lived!

This is our story during Lent. I recognise that I am a sinner and the effect of sin is isolation from the rest of the Body. A first question I need to ask is: do I really believe Jesus can heal me? Lent is the time when once again I invest in this faith in Christ's healing power and approach him asking to be healed. The leper's prayer is interesting: if you want to, you can heal me. It is a prayer of trust and at the same time a prayer of acceptance of God's will. Perhaps this can be a good prayer to pray this Lent: if you want to, you can heal me!

There is no doubt that Jesus wants to heal me: of course I want to! Healing is always available for me each time I approach Jesus. My sins are always forgiven and I am spiritually healed as long as I have the courage to approach Jesus and acknowledge him as my Lord in worship and prayer.

Mark teaches us that Jesus takes my sin upon himself; while I am healed and can now once again join the community in prayer, he is marginalised and will end up hanging on the cross. This is the Easter story Lent will help us reflect upon. If I truly believe this, and if I truly experience Jesus' healing, then I will not be able to resist the temptation to speak about what Jesus has done to me! I too become an apostle of God's love and mercy because I have experienced God's mercy in myself.

Lent is a time for me to look at myself and turn back to God. Let us be open to God's healing powers in our own life; let us be open to experience God once again in our life and let us be ready to preach about God's mercy towards us.

Fr Mario