

6th Sunday (B)

- The newspapers write about road rage & you may have seen it yourself on the roads; hopefully you haven't been the one raging with anger on the roads.
- Some have lashed out in anger & injured, even fatally someone outside a pub or nightclub.
- There seems to be a great deal of angry people, often taking out their anger on innocent people, or lashing out in anger disproportionately to how they have been hurt.
- It seems to be a real problem that many do not know what to do with their anger & express it in destructive ways.
- There are anger management courses made available & sometimes made obligatory by law courts for people who can't manage their anger.
- As Christians we've somehow got it into our psyche that anger is wrong & that we need to avoid it at all costs – good people don't get angry.
- But this is unrealistic & wrong – there is nothing wrong with anger – it is amoral – has no morality, because it is a feeling – it is what we do with anger that makes it right or wrong.
- Sometimes translators of the Bible get it wrong for all the best reasons.
- We are used to hearing in today's Gospel that Jesus was 'filled with pity' when he encountered the leper, but the Greek word Mark uses is more accurately translated 'anger', not 'pity'.
- With the exception of the cleansing of the temple in John's Gospel, generations of translators found it hard to imagine Jesus angry.
- Jesus' anger, however, provides a wonderful insight into him, & a strong challenge to us.
- Anger can tell us that something is wrong, unfair or unjust.
- It is an important & valuable emotion. Anger in itself is value-neutral.
- It's what we do with it that defines its effect in our lives.
- Some of us sit on it & stew; others gain energy from their anger to right the wrong.
- People who had any type of skin disease in first century Palestine were called lepers - they were treated shamefully.
- They had to live outside the villages & towns, call out 'unclean, unclean' when they came near others, could never attend the temple & were considered cursed by God & so excluded from the Chosen People.
- No wonder Jesus was angry when he encountered a man with leprosy.
- Here he also confronts a social class system that robbed this man of his human dignity & religious laws that robbed him of hope.
- There are two details in this story that are especially important.
- The man with leprosy feels comfortable enough to go straight up to Jesus, to put his case, & ask for healing. We are told that Jesus touched him.

- Social & religious laws were being broken in this encounter.
- But Jesus' healing of the man isn't just about challenging social laws & taboos; Jesus tells the man to fulfil his religious obligations so that he can attend the temple again & rejoin the community.
- Jesus was interested in converting all those he met to the higher laws of love & compassion.
- We are challenged this Sunday to trust our anger.
- This is not only about fighting for our rights when we have been wronged, but more so, it's fighting for the dignity & rights of others.
- Human history is filled with the lives of people who constructively & positively channelled their anger to make changes in society that would bring justice to people's lives – people who had been trampled-on, exploited & abused – to put into place practices that are just & dignifying, some of which we just take for granted today.
- And we can do it today.
- Today, were it not for the lockdown, we were going to welcome at Mass the new students to St. Thomas' school & commission student leaders, & in preparing for that, I was going to say something about what I believe Catholic education should be about today – the formation of young people not just towards careers, but to take on the mind and heart of Jesus to firstly SEE where there is wrong & injustice & then to begin to put into place changes wherever we can, to bring about a more just society.
- This can take many forms: taking the life of those yet to be born, or who are near natural death, fighting for future generations by calling for a just care of the earth, & it can be about standing up for those people in our home, parish, workplace, neighbourhood, country & world who are treated shamefully, excluded, derided, or declared unclean in a variety of ways.
- Why should we bother?
- Because this Sunday Christ comes to us, again, & declares that despite what we might think about ourselves, or what we have been told, there is nothing in us which cannot be healed or is beyond hope.
- That in the right frame of mind & with a desire to love people as Jesus calls us to do, we may be impassioned by an anger at wrongs in the world to make a good difference to the lives of others.
- Otherwise, by remaining uninformed, by being silent, by not doing anything, we are complicit in the wrongs that are done by those who exploit others & the world's resources just for themselves.
- May this Eucharist give us the love & compassion of Christ to fight for others' dignity because of the dignity we have received from Him.
- May we trust our anger & pray that it be like that of Jesus, & so turn us into agents of change for a more just church & for a more just world.