

**SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (2/14-15/2009)**

*Leviticus 13/1-2, 44-46, Psalm 32, 1 Corinthians 10/31-11/1, Mark 1/40-45*

Today's Gospel passage offers an object lesson on how NOT to respond to Jesus.

A man afflicted with leprosy approached Jesus seeking help.

Jesus, the text says, was "*moved with pity*" and then reached out to touch the man pronouncing him clean.

The scene continued on, for Jesus warned the man to keep the cure to himself once he had satisfied the prescriptions of the Jewish law.

*"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."*

Those sanctions are hinted at in the sad reading from *Leviticus* today.

And what did the obviously overjoyed ex-leper do?

Exactly what Jesus had said he should not do!

*"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."*

(It may well have been that, once word got out that Jesus had touched an unclean leper, he was no longer welcome among the "clean" people!)

Whatever, Jesus had his own agenda in mind; it did not include healing every sick person he met.

Otherwise he would have had no time to spread the Good News that there was a new kind of healing in the air.

Not every one who was leprous could hope to be clean, not every blind person could hope to see, not every paralytic could hope to walk again.

Just as not every one of us can expect that our petitions sent up to God be fulfilled precisely as we want them to be.

It doesn't work that way!

But everyone who is willing to believe in Jesus as coming from the Father has the possibility of living a full, integrated life, a life that makes sense in God's eyes.

The enthusiastic leper did Jesus a disservice, though probably not out of any malice.

He helped propagate a misleading message.

On the plus side, his encounter with Jesus reminds us that Jesus wants people to be healed.

To the leper's request for help, Jesus answered, "*I do will it; be made clean.*"

Nor will Jesus allow any human customs or laws to restrict his compassion.

That's what this passage is about: Jesus will not be stymied by our feeble efforts to marginalize "undesirables".

He keeps reaching out; he keeps on breaking down walls.

Recently a wall was breached in our country as Barack Obama, a man of African and American descent, was sworn in (though not without incident) as our 44<sup>th</sup> president.

That this rejection of racism would happen in our times is a blessing for all of us because it puts us on call that there are other barriers to be dismantled as well.

History shows it has been done; it can be done obviously, and it must be done.

And, hopefully, we are the people who will step forward to do it.