

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

## 11th February 2024 - 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Leviticus 13:1-2,44-46. 2nd: 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1. **Gospel:** Mark 1:40-45.

We are all aware and continue to be that Covid is still around. In no way would I want to suggest that the recent pandemic was just like leprosy, but at the same time, there were many similarities that affect us all.

Social distancing, masks, the lack of physical contact: constant cleansing of hands; no leper squints, but we did have closed churches, isolation.

It is ironic in today's gospel that an ex-leper, a man once condemned to live apart from society, became the very reason why Jesus had to stay in places where nobody lived?

Jesus took away the condemnation of the leprous man and restored him to town and family life.

But the man, by not listening and obeying Jesus, condemned his healer to absent himself from the towns. There is a hint of what is to come in the way Jesus took the sentence of condemnation on himself.

It is a remarkable scene, full of marked contrasts. It begins with the question with the man on his knees and gently 'If you want to you can cure me.' How does Jesus react? The gospel says 'Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him.'

Leprosy was a skin disease that made victims unclean, i.e. unfit to participate in the liturgical and social life of Israel, being separated from everyone to keep the clean and unclean apart.

Leper squints in mediaeval churches can still be seen; where the victim would stand outside the church and see the altar and elevation, but not able to be within.

Jesus reaches across this divide when he touches the leper, and although others would be defiled by such contact, he conquers the uncleanness by the greater power of his holiness.

It then says that Jesus immediately sent him away and sternly ordered him not to say anything, except to the priests who could give him a clean bill of health.

Unfortunately the healed man does exactly the opposite of what Jesus asks: he not only told the priests, but also every other person he comes across.

Suddenly Jesus is surrounded by a great throng of people looking for a quick cure.

Jesus says keep it a secret, because it is not the main focus of my mission - I have far more important work to do.

Mark portrays Jesus as shunning publicity. Mark wants to move his readers and listeners away from the adulation of a miracle worker towards a deeper appreciation of the crucified Servant of God.

The passion and cross, death and resurrection, is central in Mark's mind. It was where the ministry of Jesus reached its climax and should be central in the minds of all his disciples, i.e. Us.

Too much emphasis on the miracles only obscured the cross.

Mark's insight is very relevant for this impatient age which has no understanding of the cross.

We have been bred on speedy painkillers, instant everything and a technology that seems to put the whole world into our reach. We do not want to know our limitations.

But perhaps Covid, the aftermath, and a world in many ways in, or seeming to be, in ferment is leading people to question many things.

The cross reminds us that we must die to selfishness in order to reach higher life.

We must let go of what is good in order to reach for what is better.

We must be ready to be broken, in order to be re- made in God's fashion, willing to die in order to live.

The leper disregarded the order of Jesus to keep quiet. Oh no, he knew better; he blazed it abroad.

And the people, avid for novelty, lusting for excitement, hungry to use God, set out after Jesus.

The celebrity status and notoriety which he wanted to avoid now enveloped him.  
He could no longer move about freely but had to stay outside the places where nobody lived.

Why can't we listen to God and try to do it his way?

'Thy will, not mine be done,' is a very good entry into the Lenten season.

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