

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time—Year B

Fr. Glenn Joseph Theoret
Executive Director

www.gratitudefoundation.us
frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us

3713 County 416 20th Road
Gladstone, MI 49837

“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I

Lv 13:1-2, 44-46

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron,
“If someone has on his skin a scab or pustule or blotch
which appears to be the sore of leprosy,
he shall be brought to Aaron, the priest,
or to one of the priests among his descendants.
If the man is leprous and unclean,
the priest shall declare him unclean
by reason of the sore on his head.

“The one who bears the sore of leprosy
shall keep his garments rent and his head bare,
and shall muffle his beard;
he shall cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean!’
As long as the sore is on him, he shall declare himself unclean,
since he is in fact unclean.
He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp.”

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 32:1-2, 5, 11

R. (7) I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.
Blessed is he whose fault is taken away,
whose sin is covered.

Blessed the man to whom the LORD imputes not guilt,
in whose spirit there is no guile.

R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
my guilt I covered not.

I said, “I confess my faults to the LORD,”
and you took away the guilt of my sin.

R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you just;
exult, all you upright of heart.

R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

Reading II

1 Cor 10:31—11:1

Brothers and sisters,
Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,
do everything for the glory of God.
Avoid giving offense, whether to the Jews or Greeks or
the church of God,
just as I try to please everyone in every way,
not seeking my own benefit but that of the many,
that they may be saved.
Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Alleluia

Lk 7:16

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
A great prophet has arisen in our midst,
God has visited his people.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mk 1:40-45

A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said,
“If you wish, you can make me clean.”
Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand,
touched him, and said to him,
“I do will it. Be made clean.”
The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean.
Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once.

He said to him, “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.”

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.
He remained outside in deserted places,
and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

Exegesis

Lv 13:1-2, 44-46

Note the gap between verses. Whenever I see a gap in selected text for the Lectionary, I always pick up my bible and see what was omitted. The 42 omitted verses describe in detail various manifestations of skin diseases. Biblical leprosy (*sara at* in the OT, *lepra* in the NT) was not the disease now known as leprosy, i.e. Hansen's disease. It was a general term for *repulsive scaly skin disease*, such as psoriasis, favus, and seborrheic dermatitis.¹ At the time of Leviticus there is no evidence that Hansen's disease was present. As noted below, however, there is evidence of Hansen's disease in Palestine at the time of Jesus. Evidence of its presence goes back to 300 BCE.² The important point is the necessary separation from the community that was mandated by the Jewish Law as described in Leviticus. This follows a common theme that to remain ritually clean one had to avoid all contact with someone or something that was considered unclean.

Ps 32:1-2, 5, 11

Psalm 32 is a wisdom psalm cast in the form of psalm of thanksgiving.³ There is great wisdom in turning to God in time of need, much like the leper in today's Gospel. When we turn to God sins are taken away and healing happens: "Blessed is he whose fault is taken away whose sin is covered." When God is the subject, to *cover* sins means to take them away (Prov 17:9, Neh 3:3, 1 Pt 4:8).⁴ There is a big difference between taking away sins and forgiving sins. It seems to me that taking away goes much deeper. "Behold the Lamb of God who **takes away** the sins of the world." (Jn 1:29) Gratitude and joy are a natural response to grace.

1 Cor 10:31—11:1

Paul is exhorting the Church at Corinth to live the Gospel, to be imitators of Christ as he modeled for them. The end goal is the glory of God and the salvation of all. Perhaps the understanding of salvation connects this passage with the theme of the other readings. The word salvation comes from the Latin word *salvus* which means *to heal*. By dying on the cross Jesus takes away our sins and the temple veil is rent in two from top to bottom. That which once alienated us from God is now destroyed. Just as the leper is returned to society so we are healed if we allow God to take away our sins.

Exegesis (Continued)

Mk 1:40-45

For a brief discussion relative to leprosy see exegesis above. Our Gospel scene is the beginning of the second day of the public ministry of Jesus. He moves from a night of prayer to entering the region of Galilee and is assessable to all. Against the ritual law of Leviticus, a leper approached Jesus. Instead of following the law and repelling the leper Jesus reaches out and touches him. Both actions would have been shocking to those who witnessed the interaction. Jesus was moved with pity. A literal translation would be *Jesus was moved to the depth of His being*. We see this deep human emotion of Jesus often in the Gospels. The depth of His being is love. The leper in turn shows a deep faith, "If you wish You can make me clean." When faith and love meet healing happens.

We live in a world of alienation caused by the Fall and the sins of the world, personal and societal. Sin is alienation from God, from each other and from all of creation. The healing of the leper restored him to communion. It is healing from alienation. Therefore, it is deeply symbolic of Salvation itself. Jesus came into our world to restore us to oneness.

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1. New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Brown, Fitzmeyer, Murphy, P.H. p. 69.
 2. Sacra Pagina, The Gospel of Mark, Donahue, Harrington, M.G. p. 88.
 3. New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Brown, Fitzmeyer, Murphy, P.H. p. 531.
 4. New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Brown, Fitzmeyer, Murphy, P.H. p. 531.

Reflection

The ancient scourge of leprosy is the backdrop of our readings this weekend. It certainly was a serious problem in the time of Jesus. Hanson's disease, as it is more formally known, was extremely contagious and almost always fatal. It would progress to a slow and miserable death. Because it was so contagious it was imperative to quickly separate those infected from society to avoid its spreading. Naturally people wanted to avoid contact at all costs. Those with leprosy had to cover themselves and call out "unclean" "unclean" as they moved about. For a leper to approach anyone was strictly against the law. For someone to touch a leper was unheard of. What the leper did and what Jesus did would have placed everyone who witnessed the event into a state of shock; but the leper did approach Jesus and Jesus did touch him and he was healed, and that too was unheard of!

At its deepest level the leper represents a state of alienation from God, from society and from all of creation, a separation caused by sin. Ultimately separation from God is called death, or the great emptiness. With love comes freewill, and with freewill comes the ability to cut ourselves off from the source of all love and mercy, the source of all communion and union with God, others, and the created universe. This primordial alienation is part of the fallen human condition. The deepest longing of the human heart is for the restoration of this deserted state.

To touch a leper was to become a leper, to become unclean. Jesus touches the leper, and we are told goes out into the desert. He takes on the leprosy of our fallen human condition. Jesus enters our alienation. He takes our sins to the cross to take away our sins. He takes on our death to destroy death. He allows Himself to be alienated from His Fathers' love. This is the real Passion. It is infinite love separated for a time.

At the Last Supper Jesus prayed, "...May they be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also might be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (Jn 17:21) This was His final prayer as He walked out into the Garden of Gethsemani. "It is for this hour that I came," Jesus said. He came into our world to save us, to restore the alienation caused by sin. At the moment that He died on the cross the temple veil was rent in two from top to bottom. The barrier between us and God made by human hands was destroyed once for all by Jesus. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me." By traveling to the depth of God forsakenness Jesus takes the place of the leper.

Now it is up to us. As we journey now into the Season of Lent, we will be reminded to rend our hearts open. The penitential season challenges us to repent, to constantly reconnect with God, the source of all love and mercy. God is one, and therefore, the source of all unity, our deepest longing. When we connect with the source of all that is we connect with all that is. Our common union with God makes us one. That is why we refer to the Eucharist as Communion. It is the sharing of a common union with God and with each other. In a cosmic sense the Eucharist connects us with the entire universe. Ponder that the next time that you approach the Altar.

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen. Amen.

In Jesus and Mary,



Personal Witness

I was privileged to attend the University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein Seminary from August of 1994 through graduation in May of 1999. The Seminary is in Mundelein, Il., which is about 45 miles north of Chicago. As I began my seminary training as a 42-year-old second vocation student, I found myself surrounded by recent college graduates and second career men. My class of 35 students was comprised of almost 60% second career vocations. My class consisted of lawyers, accountants, teachers, a medical doctor, a dentist, an entomologist, a rocket scientist just to mention a few. We were encouraged to take charge of our formation time there and to seek out ministries in the area to serve God's people.

My volunteer ministry for most of my time was to help at the daily community meal program in Waukegan, Il. A good friend of mine who was the doctor in the class volunteered at the Alexian Brothers Bonaventure House on the south side of Chicago. I accompanied him on numerous occasions as it often was linked to a dinner out at one of Chicago's fine restaurants.

The Bonaventure House was a very difficult ministry for me. It currently serves as a rehab center for recovering drug addicts. Back then it was exclusively a home for men dying with AIDS. Various drug and treatment programs for HIV and AIDS were in the infancy stages back then. There were still a lot of unanswered questions regarding transmissibility and progression of the disease. I recall being terrified of contact with the patients and all things that they may have been in contact with. My friend assured me that I was in no danger, but I still found myself a bit queasy while I was there.

We were volunteering as a ministry of presence. After several visits we were able to establish a bit of a relationship with the residence and staff. Most of these men in their late twenties or early thirties were in the late stages of life. Many were quite literally picked off the streets as they had nowhere else to go. They had nothing but the clothes they were wearing when first admitted. One of the most common sentiments among them was a feeling of deep regret. Many were very remorseful for the direction that their lives had taken. Some were very angry at themselves and at life in general. But most of all there was a deep loneliness and emptiness, a great sense of alienation. I recall thinking that these men are modern day lepers.

One of our missions was to help residence reconnect with family and friends, and of course most importantly with God. Most had abandoned their relationship with God somewhere along their journey. For those who were Catholic we worked to bring them back to the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. Sometimes we were successful and sometimes not. At times the staff was able to find family and next of kin and sometimes not, sometimes the family refused the invitation to come and reconcile. The ministry of the Alexian Brothers was to support them in a community setting. Often all they could do would be to hold the hand of a dying person.

One of the great tragedies of our time is alienation. Certainly, we all felt that deep sense of isolation during the recent pandemic. God is a community of persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We were created in God's image and likeness and so we were created for community; unity with God, each other and all of God's creation. And so we pray the great priestly prayer of Jesus the night before He died, "Father may they be one as You and I are one." (Jn 17:22)

F. Glenn