

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, February 11th, 2018

Lord, I offer You this day my prayers, works, joys and sufferings. May they be for Your Glory! Please heal the diseases of my soul.

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

¹The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, The disease of leprosy is always fatal unless it is treated. It is a bacterial disease that is slow in developing, sometimes taking even years. In nodular leprosy, the patient exhibits eruptions, which develop into nodules, which in turn become open sores.

Anesthetic leprosy exhibits a degeneration of the nerves, loss of sensation and muscular movement, and progressive paralysis with loss of extremities (the fingers, then hands and arms fall off). There is also the mixed type, which exhibits both sets of symptoms. Leprosy was widely held as being a punishment for some sin.

²“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.

⁴⁴If the man is leprous and unclean, the priest shall declare him unclean by reason of the sore on his head.

⁴⁵The 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!’ Because leprosy was an infectious disease, every effort had to be made to keep it from spreading. A person with leprosy had to live in settlements or camps away from towns. When traveling about, he had to warn people he was coming by shouting to show he was unclean; he wore his clothes torn and hair uncombed. All this was meant to make him stand out so that people could avoid him easily.

⁴⁶As 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.”

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

Brothers and sisters,

³¹whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. A Christian should seek the glory of God by always acting with the best of intentions. In the case of meals, the practice of saying grace before and after helps us to be mindful of God in that situation. St. Basil commented on this scripture: “When you sit down to eat, pray. When you eat bread, do so thanking him for being so generous to you. If you drink wine, be mindful of him who has given it to you for your pleasure and as a relief in sickness. When you dress, thank him for his kindness in providing you with clothes. When you look at the sky and the beauty of the stars, throw yourself at God’s feet and adore him who in his wisdom has arranged things in this way. Similarly, when the sun goes down and when it rises, when you are asleep or awake, give thanks to God, who created and arranged all things for your benefit to have you know, love and praise their Creator.”

³²Avoid giving offense, whether to the Jews or Greeks or the church of God, In this passage, Paul is responding to those who were worried about eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Paul makes the distinction between what we consume and what we do: our behavior toward others is more important than what we eat or drink. Jesus makes the same distinction in another passage: “It is not what goes into us that makes us evil; it’s what comes out of us that makes us sinners: greed, lust, blasphemy, envy, hatred, violence. These proceed from the heart and are sinful.”

33just as I try to please everyone in every way, not seeking my own benefit but that of the many, that they may be saved.

1Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. Paul tells us to imitate him, not because he is so perfect, but because he is following Christ who is our only proper model.

Mark 1:40-45

40A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, “If you wish, you can make me clean.” Leprosy was a skin disease that made victims “unclean” or unfit to participate in the liturgical life of Israel. Because ritual uncleanness was considered contagious under the Old Covenant, infecting everyone who came in contact with it, lepers were isolated from society to keep those who were clean separated from those who were unclean. Jesus reaches across this divide when he touches the leper, and though others would be defiled by such contact, he conquers the uncleanness by the greater power of his holiness.

41Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean.” Christ’s compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God, the third mystery of the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary. Jesus brings into the world a divine holiness that overpowers the causes of defilement: sin, disease, demons, and even death. The Jews considered those defiled by these things to be unclean and untouchable. Jesus, however, takes an offensive stance against evil and by his mighty words and physical touch heals the effects of sin. He was himself immune to uncleanness by the superior power of his holiness.

42The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. The curing of lepers was one of the signs of the messianic times prophesied in the Old Testament. Moved by so much suffering, Christ made the miseries of the sick his own: “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.” On the cross, Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the “sin of the world,” of which illness is only a consequence. He also gave new meaning to suffering: it can now bring us closer to Christ and allows us to participate in the saving work of Jesus! Symbolically, St. Augustine wrote that Jesus’ cleansing of the leper signifies the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Leprosy represents mortal sin, the spiritual disease that extinguishes grace from the soul and impedes one’s full participation in the Church. This condition can also be contagious and influence others through scandal and false contrition. The Levitical priest typifies New Covenant priests, who are instrumental in reconciling sinners with God and restoring them to spiritual health through the sacrament.

43Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once.

44He 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.” “See that you tell no one anything.” The “messianic secret” is a leading theme in Mark. Jesus frequently enjoins silence on demons and men to conceal his identity as the Messiah, for he wanted to avoid a sensationalist reputation of being no more than a wonder-worker. Spreading the news of the work he has done comes with the danger that rumors will begin to disconnect his miracles from his saving message. He also wanted to sidestep popular expectations that the Messiah would be a political and military leader. Then, there is the consideration that he did not wish to ignite the wrath of his enemies before the appointed time of his Passion. The Law of Moses required Levitical priests to inspect lepers and determine their status as clean or unclean. With approval, an individual pronounced

clean would offer sacrifices at the Temple tailored to his ability to pay and then would undertake procedures for cleansing and reinstatement into the covenant life of Israel.

⁴⁵The 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.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from “The Catechism of the Catholic Church,” “Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers: 2005” by Aelred R. Rosser; the “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark and The Gospel of Matthew,” the “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., “The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch and: Corinthians.”

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who originally compiled these commentaries.