

6th Sunday of the Year/B

Be Healed

Today's Gospel, which tells of Jesus' meeting with a leper, has more significance for us following our experience of the COVID pandemic. In Jesus' time, there was no cure for leprosy and the only way to limit its spread was to keep lepers apart from the community – to quarantine them. They could not enter any town but had to live outside in the wilderness, and wear clothes that were torn and keep their hair dishevelled. And if anyone came near, they had to shield their upper lip and cry out “unclean, unclean, (that is, stay away, stay away)”. This was very cruel for the lepers but the only way to limit the spread of this disease.

When Jesus saw the leper, he was filled with compassion for him, and he reached out his hand and touched the man. In doing so he risked contracting the disease himself. Sometimes fulfilling Jesus' great command to love means putting ourselves at risk. Many doctors and healthcare workers did this during the pandemic, as do firefighters and rescue workers in bushfires and floods.

After Jesus healed the leper, he asked only one thing of him: ‘don't say anything to anyone about how you were cured’. And what did the healed leper do? – he told everyone! Once a teacher in a Catholic primary school asked her students: ‘What would you do if you were Jesus and you healed someone and told him not to tell anyone, and the person told everyone?’, and a little 10-year-old boy answered as only 10-year-old boys can, ‘I'd have given him back his leprosy straight away!’ But of course, Jesus didn't do that because his love for the man was unconditional!

At the beginning of today's Gospel Jesus could go into the towns but the leper could not. By the end of the story the leper, who is now healed, can go into the towns again, but because he told everyone that Jesus had healed him, Jesus could not go into the towns, but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived. The roles are reversed. Having healed the leper, Jesus now must live like a leper himself. To love fully often means sharing the condition of those we love.

May we, like Jesus, be moved with compassion for all who are sick and suffering in our world today, and that is so many people. If necessary, may we be willing to risk ourselves to help those we can, even to sharing their situation. Let us pray for the grace that our love for everyone may be unconditional.

Fr Michael Goonan SSP