

## Homily St Pius–St Anthony 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2

I love this leper we hear about today in the gospel. The opening line of the gospel alone (Mark 1:40, 'the leper approached Jesus and kneeling said, "If you wish, you can make me clean.") gives us a whole homily. This leper's spiritual disposition is the perfect model of discipleship. I want to highlight his wonderful attitude, but I have to say something first about where his spiritual outlook comes from and the fact that it is related to the type of Messiah Jesus is. This leper has been watching Jesus closely.

I know it is a frequent refrain of mine, but it is so true: 'What a personal savior Jesus is (really personal and close to people- you want to know & talk to this guy)!' We have such an approachable and accessible and relatable Savior in Christ. We see it today in this healing of a leper. Jesus touches this guy. I mean he really touches him – a leper – and that is taboo. That is exactly how the contagious leprosy is spread (or so they thought at the time- which is real tragedy because they say now that leprosy was a whole range of diseases and many of them likely weren't transmitted by skin contact-caused by more internal viruses). But still, Jesus touches the leper. He heals the man. We have to work to understand how much that meant to the leper - to be touched by another human being! Yet, I want to point out how strong a faith and trust the leper had ***in even approaching*** Jesus (again, I think he had been watching Jesus from a distance for a while – kind of leper stalking). Lepers had certain rules that they had to follow --1) they had to stay away from crowds- 2) they had to wear torn clothes to visibly show their wounds as warning flags cautioning others not to get near or touch, 3) they had to announce themselves –yell-- as they approached someone on the road 'I'm leper- stand back' which probably often put them down in the ditch getting out of the way as the normal healthy citizens passed by on the road. So in this case, our leper has faith and courage to break from his own pack (again, lepers hung around together for safety-ran as a pack- security of a gang to make it together-they shared such a badge of ostracism). His fellow lepers may have thought him crazy to try approaching Jesus? But this leper approached Jesus to ask for healing. He does approach with absolute and the utmost respect, as he kneels and asks Jesus for healing. And guess what? Surprise, Jesus reaches out and touches him! I wonder if the leper thought, "So, that is what that it feels like!-It's been so long a time!) Yet, Jesus always gives the personal touch..... (like when he takes aside from the noisy crowd the Deaf Decapolis man in Mark 7:31, or when he calls to meet blind Bartimaeus from a huge crowd in Mk 10:49 or the woman with hemorrhage in huge crowd that touched him, and Jesus 'sought her out' Mark 5:32). This is our personal messiah Jesus who gives 'more than just the 'time of day' to this leper he gives the 'time of a life' to him by showing his individual importance and actually touching his diseased body to heal him. That extended hand of Jesus also showed the leper's reunion to full human society as Jesus goes on to tell him to go

present himself to the priest in the temple-that would have signaled his official clearance of 'no more quarantine-isolation'. Now he is welcomed back into society-fellowship with everyone else. But don't you love, too the leper's attitude 'You can heal me ***if you wish***'. It is as if the leper is saying, 'Jesus I want to do what you want me to. If you want me to stay a leper, I will be the best leper you ever saw-but would you heal me?' It's like the leper wants to serve Jesus any way he can (as a leper or not as a leper-'either way-I'm fine with you', the leper seems to say). This makes us look forward to what Jesus tells the Father in the garden of Gethsemane facing down his torture and crucifixion, '*If possible, remove this cup, yet not my will but yours be done*' (Mark 14:36). Jesus heals him, but I could imagine Jesus also saying, "You are so good about lifting the morale of the other lepers-helping them keep faith, you can do more good for God as a leper". But regardless, Jesus feels such compassionate sympathy for the man that He heals him.

Staying with how personal and compassionate Jesus is to us; notice the 'trading places' or flip-around that happens in this gospel. Keep in mind that as the story began, the leper is on the outs of society (because of fear/prejudice they were put out - quarantined away from society), but then he has an encounter with Jesus, and then he is cleared by priest at the temple and gets back in. But notice what happened to Jesus! Mark 1:45 says that as report/word spread about Jesus, "it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. ***He remained outside in deserted places,***" So now, Jesus is on the outs having to remain outside in deserted places (because of great crowds-popularity). Jesus took the man's place. Don't we say that about Jesus when it comes to our salvation? He takes our place when it comes to sin and death. What we have coming by our guilt, Jesus willingly takes on himself. He died that we might live. This is said so often in scripture; teaching us the type of Savior we have. St Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that ***Jesus was made 'to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.'*** And in 2 Corinthians 8:9 that ***Jesus "became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich."*** and of course, the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah 53:3-5 may say it best, that 'he was pierced for our offenses....bore our sins in His body...***by his wounds we are healed***'. What wonderful signs of leadership that he identifies with his subjects, again as the shepherd who became a lamb, like the best superior who is in the trench with his/her troops, Jesus comes to us and says, 'Let me take it, you go on, I will cover this.' And Jesus does! I said earlier that this leper must have been watching Jesus to inspire him to have that awesome attitude of a disciple: 'Jesus if you wish, you may heal me'. If not, okay-I still love and serve you. He has seen Jesus style of serving leadership, and we have too! What a Savior he is to come to us and touch us. Such a savior naturally fills us with gratitude and a desire to serve him, to consider what Jesus would do and does do, every moment for and in place of us!