

St Pius & St Anthony 6th Sunday Ordinary Year B2

Did you hear back in January the news account about a man in Traverse City Michigan who fell through the ice of a local lake. His dog Ruby (a type of beagle) was with him, standing by his side, as he was too light to fall through the ice himself. After bystanders called 911, a policeman named Kammeron Bennetts, arrived, and assessed the situation and quickly came up with an idea to have the dog help. He told the man to send his dog to him. He did, and Officer Bennetts tied the rescue disc tethered on a rope to Ruby's collar. Then he told the man to call back his dog, and Ruby complied and went back to his owner. Long story short, the dog Ruby delivered the rescue rope, and the fire department helpers pulled the man out of icy water, sliding him across the surface of the lake to the shore. Saved! I'd say his dog Ruby got initiated into real service animal status that day! That is the best possible outcome possible! Yet, we probably know of helping outcomes that didn't work out so smoothly. Like a time I tried to pull someone out of the ditch with my truck and ended up locking my keys in the truck. Or maybe you tried pulling someone into the boat on the lake, and it turned out you went swimming with them. Well, because it is Jesus, it always turns out well, whether it goes the way we think it should or not. If Jesus pulls us out of a hole and ends up in it himself, it is because he wants to get in it with us, completely voluntary. He wants to join us by our side; a Savior who personally feels with us.

Mark's gospel is so wonderfully crafted (of course it is by the Holy Spirit's guidance) all gospels are wisely crafted, each in their own unique way, but Mark's wonderfully ties together stories by linking special details or by using opening and closing matches. Mark never wastes an opportunity to teach us more about Jesus. Today what we hear, sounds like a straight-forward leper healing story! That is great for the leper! But it is great for us, as it teaches us something about what Jesus does for us too! Notice the 'trading places' dance that occurs in today's gospel. The gospel begins with an ostracized leper (they are always quarantined & presumed contagious) & they had to stay out of the camp. The leper encounters Jesus then, and notice how the gospel ends – the man is healed and sent back into the public spaces of the temple-city, and where does Jesus end up? Mark 1:45 says, "it was impossible for Jesus *to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places*" Hey, that sounds like leper behavior. Jesus switches/trades places with the leper – kind of like what Jesus does for us by dying so that we might live. He takes our place on the cross (just like he took the place of Barabbas in the prisoner release/exchange Pilate pulls off at the end of Mark's gospel 15:15). Jesus loves us that much. He takes our place. What is coming to us,

Jesus takes us on Himself to help us/to save us! Jesus does that for us.

But there is even more going on here in this gospel. Jesus healed the man. That is done. So, what is behind Jesus sending the man on, for him to register with the Temple and the priests? I find a couple of things happening here. One, Jesus is following the protocol for having lepers declared clean, that it's safe for them to rejoin human society (again they were terribly marginalized & excluded) but also, secondly, Jesus is subtly evangelizing the priests, letting it be known at Temple headquarters that healing is being done out in the hinterlands (that the Temple pools don't have a monopoly on healing). For the leper's sake, reporting to Temple brings an ease and simplicity of having him most smoothly reinserted into the community – He gets a 'clean leprosy test' from the Temple. But let's not underestimate the simultaneous spread of word about Jesus that would result from the priest health questionnaire given the leper. We've all been through the medical history portion of doctor visits. We know all of the many questions. Imagine them: "When did the leprous sores first appear? Has leprosy run in family? Was the breakout chronic or did it flare at times? When did you notice the wounds healing? Did you try any home treatments? Be assured that the leper gave ample answers about Jesus' healing touch. The leper would have announced to the Temple Priests, this spiritual physician out there we know as Jesus Christ! But I also think Jesus accomplished another goal of ensuring that the healed leper had good opportunity to make a personal offering sacrifice to God at the Temple – a sign of gratitude to God for healing!

I also understand Jesus' directive that sent the man to the temple, to also give us some wisdom about the season of Lent that we are about to enter. Jesus was upholding proper protocol and procedure (or what we call tradition/custom) when he told the man, 'Go on to the Temple'. I think Jesus was saying, "*Trust the Process – Follow Through.*" That phrase gets thrown around a lot in HR circles, in recovery groups and in sports! It was popularized by the General Manager of the Philadelphia 76ers, Sam Hinkie back around 2013. He led the 76ers program into a 'comeback' phase, and pushed the mantra "Trust the Process" to account for his ground-up rebuilding program. He made a controversial player trade or two, and a couple surprising draft picks. To justify them, he just kept telling the team, "Trust the Process." Like saying, "Keep your head down-keep moving forward- Yes, its sacrifice now, but wait-the good is coming." A loss here and there now, will bring us wins later. I think Jesus could tell us something like that as we enter Lent this Ash Wednesday. "Trust the Process-Enter the Desert". Lent will move us to Easter. Trust the Process of Lent Our sacrifice will lead us to deeper life to come.