

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

6th Sunday of Ordinary Time | For Sunday, February 14, 2021

Profound Healing

Written by Bro. Silas Henderson, SDS

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1

Mark 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, and said to him,
"I do will it. Be made clean."*

—Mark 1:40-41

On the Sundays of Ordinary Time, the first reading and the Gospel proclaimed at Mass form a unit of readings, with one serving to enrich our understanding of the other. Sometimes, the connection isn't especially obvious. On other Sundays, such as the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, we can see a much clearer conversation between these texts. Not only is the connection fairly obvious, the first reading from Leviticus provides the cultural and religious context that are essential in understanding the story we hear from Mark's Gospel.

The Book of Leviticus can be understood as a collection of laws touching on nearly every aspect of life that is grounded in an effort to maintain Jewish cultural and religious values. As biblical scholar J. Edward Owens, O.Ss.T., observes, Leviticus helped do this through "its preservation of liturgical, social, and other prescriptions that acknowledge God's holiness and seek to inculcate such holiness in the people," (from [Leviticus, volume 4 of the New Collegeville Bible Commentary](#)). Part of the way Leviticus does this is by setting the boundaries of what it means to be "clean" and "unclean." This is important because what is at stake here is not just what it means to be holy and righteous before God, but it also speaks about the quality of our relationships with our families and communities.

[Chapter 13](#) of Leviticus (where our first reading is found) is completely devoted to diseases of the skin, none of which can be associated directly with [leprosy \(Hansen's disease\)](#). According to Leviticus, skin diseases, as well as scars and burns, render persons unclean. What is at stake here is the question of contagion and the health of the community. We should notice that there is no association between having a skin disease and being a sinner. Because of their condition, however, the sick person was ostracized from the community. As Owens observes, "On the one hand, no one wanted to contract the disease by proximity or touching. On the other hand, drawing the afflicted person back into the community was a value. Probably victims of skin disease were more pitied than judged." As a result of all this, lepers, and those with other diseases of the skin became outsiders, surviving at the furthest margins of the community.

As we turn to the Gospel and the story of Jesus healing a leper, this sense of being marginalized should help guide our reading of this passage. For the sick man to approach Jesus was a courageous act. Remember, by law he was expected to maintain a specified distance from those who were judged to be clean or healthy. There is more at stake here than physical health. This Gospel passage certainly speaks to Jesus' power to heal, but the deeper meaning that Mark is trying to communicate is that Jesus has the power to restore relationships as he invites everyone — the rich and poor, the healthy and the sick, the sinner and the saint — into the Kingdom.

When he hears the sick man's request, "If you wish, you can make me clean," Jesus has a deep emotional response. The verb used here is *splanchnizomai*, which literally means to be moved in "the intestines." To say it another way, Jesus has a "gut reaction" to the man's appeal. Instead of turning away from the man, Jesus reaches out to him, touches him, and heals him: "I do will it. Be made clean."

Through his encounter with Jesus, the man is not only restored to health, but he is, in a sense, brought back to life by being able to return to the life of the community and to the practice of his ancestral faith. The end of our passage tells that the man publicly professed what God had done for him through Jesus. This is certainly an invitation for us to reflect

on how we express our gratitude for the healing and forgiveness we have experienced in our own lives.

Bro. Silas Henderson, SDS

PRAYER

Watch, O Lord, with those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight,
and give Your angels charge over those who sleep.
Tend Your sick ones, loving Lord.
Rest Your weary ones.
Bless Your dying ones.
Soothe Your suffering ones.
Pity Your afflicted ones.
Shield Your joyous ones.
Give strength and vigilant awareness for all Your care givers
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

— Adapted from a prayer by Sr. Mary Christa Korening,
OSB and shared by the [Catholic Health Association
of the United States of America](#)