

# From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembor

## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B – February 14, 2021

This weekend's Gospel of Mark is one of the great narratives in Jesus' healing ministry. I am talking about the healing of the leper. Notice the healing power of Jesus is very much emphasized certainly in Matthew and Luke. Jesus is a healer, but he much more of a teacher in those gospels. In Mark's Gospel Jesus is a healer; He is a wonder worker.

So, we first hear, "*A leper came to Jesus.*" Stay with this phrase because we will be unpacking the rich meaning contained in this one line. Notice also that the church juxtaposes this Gospel with the first reading from the Book of Leviticus. This is important because we learn from the Book of Leviticus precisely what being a leper meant for the first century Jew.

### **A Leper Came to Jesus**

A leper came to Jesus. Today we would interpret that to mean a person with a skin disease came to Jesus. For the first century Jew there was more to this statement.

1. **Public** Think about the HIPPA law today. You cannot disclose my medical records to anyone else with out my permission. Being a leper meant that you were publicly declared unclean.
2. **Garment/Head Bare** It meant that one's garment had to be permanently torn and his head kept bare. These are all signs of degradation among first century Jews. Your head had to be covered all the time especially when you were in prayer. In the case of the leper, his head had to be kept bare.
3. **Unclean! Unclean!!** Plus, he was compelled to cry out "unclean! unclean!!" so that no one would come near him. There is something really sad about this leper. Can you imagine that each time you left your house you had to remind people that you were bad news, that they had to stay away from you. It would be bad enough when you left your house

and people avoided you. But in this case, you were obliged morally to tell people to stay away.

4. **Worship** Today we think of worship in terms of coming to Mass for 45 minutes every Sunday. The entire community came together at worship. The Temple was everything for the ancient Israel. As a leper you were excluded from common life, common meals and worship. This would be a very devastating experience.
5. **We all want to live with people that we love and cherish.** Well, the leper had a different experience. We hear from the Book of Leviticus; *"He shall dwell apart making his abode outside the camp."* This meant something really awful to live apart.

Friends, all of this is contained in that single phrase *"A leper came to Jesus."*

### **Identify with This Leper**

All of us are meant, in one way or another, to identify with this leper. In sickness, weakness, in our shame, in our sin, in our oddness, we all - to some degree - are like this leper. What is it in your private or public life that you are ashamed/embarrassed about? Something you want Jesus to heal? We all have leprosy and we are invited today to make that spiritual move, to come to Jesus just like the man in today's Gospel.

Once in his presence we hear *"the leper knelt down and begged him."* Mathew's version says *"he worshiped him"* Luke's version is *"he fell on his face."* It is important to note all three of these have the same sense. This suffering man realizes Jesus is the only one to whom worship is due.

Kneeling demonstrates a posture/attitude of worship.

Whatever we are troubled about/challenged by/ashamed of/embarrassed about, we must always come to Jesus in the attitude of worship. When we truly worship Jesus, the extraordinary happens. We will be kneeling down shortly during our liturgy today as we do every time we celebrate Mass. Bring those troubles to Jesus.

Then comes the leper's **petitionary line**: "*If you wish you, you can make me clean.*" The leper is not demanding; he is not insisting. It's our version of '*Thy will be done*' - not mine.

Moved with pity, Jesus stretches out His hand and touched him. The leper is healed. The leper, who is unclean, does not render Jesus unclean by His physical touch rather Jesus renders the man clean instead.

We pray God will heal us today of whatever troubles us or whatever we are embarrassed about or ashamed of. Just as he healed the Leper in today's Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Barron's Homily for Feb.11, 2018 was helpful.