

If You Wish, You Can Make Me Clean

1st Reading: Lv 13:1-2, 44-46

| **2nd Reading:** 1 Cor 10:31—11:1

| **Gospel:** Mk 1:40-45

GROW: While leprosy as found in Biblical times is now rare and very treatable, it is not hard to imagine the tragic consequences it had on those who were affected. They suffered physically, but also socially and emotionally: Levitical priests declared lepers unclean, banishing them from the religious community. Jesus, as he did so often, would upend these conventions in his encounter with the leper in today's Gospel. "Moved with pity," Jesus healed him, telling him to return to the local priest for readmittance to the community. Jesus' model of compassion for the man is meant for us to embody. Modern culture continues to stigmatize people perceived as different – those suffering from depression and other mental illnesses, the homeless, perhaps those who struggle with cognitive disabilities – shunning them in different ways from full participation in community. To imitate Christ, as Paul alludes, is to have compassion for the needs of others – to "be moved with pity." Let us pray for the grace to put on the mind and heart of Christ, and dignify the presence of all our brothers and sisters in our community.

GO: I admit I was taken aback by today's Old Testament reading: Not only were lepers banished from the religious community, but they had to announce themselves by crying out "Unclean, unclean!" Jesus changed all that. He healed the leper, encouraging him to return to the priest for readmittance. I am struck by how the leper approached Jesus. He did not demand a cure, but asked, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Although it is unlikely that any of us in the developed world will experience leprosy, we ourselves or people we know may carry inner struggles that have led to separation from the Church or a sense of isolation. In our humanity, we do not have the power to heal these maladies on our own. Instead, let us come to Jesus as the leper does, asking him, if he wills it, to heal us and our wounded world. Let us pray with confidence, knowing that Jesus in his compassion can and will make us clean and whole.

REFLECT: Who are today's lepers? What are the inner struggles or wounds that may keep us from fully participating in our parish community or have left us estranged from members of our own family? Bring these before Jesus in your own words. Call a family member you have fallen out of touch with. Invite a person who has left the Church to lunch and listen with compassion.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

--Fr. Anthony Ahamefule