

6TH SUNDAY IN OT—Year B—M02-D14-Y2021

01. In the time of Jesus, suffering from leprosy meant social death—as **those with the disease had to leave their homes and families**—and live with other lepers on the outskirts of town.
02. Moreover, those living with leprosy **were restricted from having ANY CONTACT with people who did not have the disease**—and they had to ring a bell and shout “unclean” if anyone approached them.
03. They were also **excluded from public worship and visiting the market**—and had to scavenge for food—relying on the kindness and generosity of others for their survival.
04. The lepers of Jesus’ day certainly had to endure a lot of what has become VERY FAMILIAR TO US—**with regards to the social isolation and the exclusion from public worship.**
05. I was having a conversation the other day with a friend of mine, who is an ex-priest, and who was sharing some of his insights about the pandemic. He mentioned that the situation has forced us to simply survive, rather than to live—**that instead of living, we are reduced to merely surviving—much like the lepers in Jesus’ time.**
06. I thought he had some valuable insight— because I think **to survive this pandemic not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually— we ALSO have to learn how to TRULY LIVE in the midst of it — because it’s not enough to simply endure the pandemic and survive it — we ALSO have to find ways to grow, to thrive, and to live life to the fullest in the midst of it.**
07. Meaning that we can’t let the fear of the virus prevent us from living life to the full in a way that is safe and responsible—**because life will always throw challenges our way—some of which will force us to adapt and to go into survival mode — but, AGAIN, it’s not enough to simply survive, we have to find ways to truly live as well—ways to truly embrace what is fundamental about being human—ways to**

make sure we that we make room for fun and laughter, for beauty and truth, for connection with others, and for communion with God—because these are the VERY THINGS that make the difference between simply surviving and truly living.

08. Because if you're at all like me—my focus has been more about **enduring and surviving the pandemic—rather than thriving and living in the midst of it.** Which is not to say that we shouldn't take all reasonable precautions where the corona virus is concerned—**but to say that living in the midst of this pandemic is something equally worthy of our focus.**
09. One of the things that has become clear to me is that this pandemic has created the need **(and the opportunity)** to see things in a different way—to really **sharpen our spiritual vision—so that we can learn to see the Lord AT ALL TIMES, AND IN ALL THINGS—so that we are more aware of His Presence all around us, and within us—**and so that we can see His loving Hand even in the midst of these challenging times.
10. The world refuses to see God or to acknowledge Him—and uses the existence of suffering to deny Him and refute His Existence—because the world **refuses to see how any good can come from hardship—or how the hand of a loving God could be present even in the midst of hardship and challenges.**
11. A little while ago I was having a discussion with someone about the connection between sin and suffering—and I was saying that **(ULTIMATELY) suffering is a consequence of sin—**but the genius of God is that **He has made what is OFTEN the consequence of sin—into a remedy for sin as well.**
12. This is not to say that what is happening in our world is necessarily a punishment of some kind—**but rather, maybe a wake-up call of sorts—an opportunity to see things differently—and to see them more clearly —** because God allows suffering so that He can bring about an even greater good—and **to address an even greater evil—**

that greater evil often being sin itself—the pandemic that we need to be MOST concerned about.

13. And, again, this is one of the reasons why the Lord allows suffering in the first place—it's always with a greater purpose in mind — and, in some cases, **that greater purpose, that greater good is a clearer vision of things** — to see the world around us with more clarity — **to see the person we are becoming with greater insight** — to re-examine our lives and to see what is **MOST fundamental and important to life.**
14. Because God doesn't just seek our temporal good, but our ETERNAL GOOD — **and sometimes hardships and challenges are the very things needed to bring about our ETERNAL good.**
15. With the amount of suffering in the world—it's sometimes hard to see how good can come from it—but this is why we need the Holy Spirit (Whom Jesus describes as **the Spirit of Truth**) — we need the Holy Spirit to change our perspective—to sharpen our spiritual vision—and to give us (no pun intended) **2020 vision about the things happening around us, and happening to us.**
16. For it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, Who allows us to see God **in all things and at all times**—to see the Loving Hand of God even in the midst of suffering — **to not just see the surface of things— but to see the meaning and the purpose behind them**—and it is the Holy Spirit Who will give us this superior vision, this greater clarity if we ask Him.
17. Often my prayer during times of trial is for God to remove the suffering—**but recently, I've felt inspired to pray instead that my suffering not to be wasted**—that I'm able to see the good in it, and the good that can come from it—**and most of all, that I'm able to find God in it.**
18. Because it's not that we should go looking for suffering, **for the Cross will always find us—but when suffering comes our way, we should go looking for God in it**—because it's often in the midst of

trials and tribulations that we will have our most **powerful and profound experience of God**—and it is often through suffering that **we are changed for the better.**

19. One of the good that can come from suffering (if we allow it to) is that **suffering can often draw us closer to God—and suffering can help us see God as the ultimate purpose and goal of life.** Because if the path of our life is not leading us closer to God—if God is NOT our ULTIMATE GOAL in life—then we are on the wrong path.
20. And so, this pandemic is almost like **a forced retreat for the world—a retreat where we have an opportunity to draw closer to the one and true God**—and to reflect on the road by which we journey through life.
21. I once read a quote from St. Ignatius of Antioch, a bishop and martyr who died in the year 108 AD, who wrote: *“No earthly pleasures, no kingdoms of this world can benefit me in any way. I prefer death in Christ Jesus to power over the farthest limits of the earth. He Who died in place of us is the one object of my quest. He Who rose for our sake is my one desire.”*
22. In this quote, St. Ignatius describes Jesus as THE SOLE OF OBJECT of his quest in life. He is not seeking **riches, or power, or pleasures, or even security and safety—but Christ Himself—the greatest treasure we can possess in this life.**
23. Because St. Ignatius was filled with the Spirit of Truth, Who gave him the clarity to see the ultimate purpose of life—to see the truth about **real treasure versus false treasure.**
24. And so, since we are being deprived of the gift of public worship like the lepers of Jesus’ time—a benefit of this pandemic might be **to strengthen our practice and our experience of private worship—to cultivate the experience of church within our hearts — that is to turn our hearts into a living Tabernacle**—a place where we encounter the living God—a place where Jesus can be found, and where Jesus lives — **a place where we truly make Christ King—as**

the primary affection that shapes our lives—as the SOLE OBJECT of our love and focus.

25. Because any authentic experience of church lies **first and foremost in the human heart**—and the universal Church is **built upon the Presence of Christ in the human heart**—almost as much as it is **built upon the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.**
26. **And since we are (for the most part) being deprived of Christ in the Eucharist—now is the time to truly cultivate the Presence of Christ in our hearts.**
27. And just as it is the Holy Spirit Who allows us to see Christ in ALL THINGS—it is the Holy Spirit that allows Christ to live within us. **For this is not a reality we can manufacture for ourselves**—but an experience we have to ask the Holy Spirit to give us — **because just as the Spirit makes Christ present in the Eucharist—it is the Spirit Who makes Christ present in the human heart.**
28. And so, this time we have been given is a time to really make Christ Lord of our lives—to nurture the Presence of Christ in in our hearts—to **make sure, like St. Ignatius, Christ is our sole quest in life and the one true desire of our heart.**
29. Because it is ONLY when **our eyes and hearts are fixated on Jesus, that we can weather any storm.** For EVEN IN TIMES OF SUFFERING the Lord has not left us orphaned—and **in fact, is closer to us than ever in these times of great difficulty and stress.**
30. And so, this pandemic has given us the time to really **BE with the Lord and to allow Him to be with us**—to allow Him to embrace us and to love us in our challenges and struggles—in our fears and worries—**so that even in the midst of this pandemic, we’re not simply surviving but living.**
31. So, on this the 6TH Sunday in Ordinary Time, let us ask the Holy Spirit **to touch us, to heal us, and to transform us during these challenging times—SO THAT we can see God in all things and all times—even in the midst of this pandemic—in the midst of our**

suffering — **and let us ask the Holy Spirit** that this time will not be wasted but will be used to draw us closer to God—and **to make Jesus the ultimate focus of our lives, and the one true Lord and King of our Hearts. AMEN.**