

FROM FR. CHRIS ALIMAJI'S DESK

Reflections on the Killer Diseases of our Time

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, February 14, 2021. Our Readings are Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46; 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1; Mark 1:40-45; and our Song of Praise is Psalm 32. Happy Valentine's Day! Regarding Diseases and Sickesses, I have 3 Points of View: (1) The Ancient Approach; (2) Christ's Religion Approach. (3) Breaking and Crossing the Barriers with Jesus.

(1) The Ancient Approach: Leprosy as a disease was thought to be a punishment, and regarded as seriously sinful. "If someone has on his skin a scab or pustule or blotch which appears to be the sore of leprosy, **he shall be brought to Aaron, the priest, or to one of the priests among his descendants.**" (Lev. 13:1). **The priest shall declare him unclean**, and he will be isolated, excluded from the community. "He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp." (Lev.13:46). The coronavirus disease nowadays helps us to understand what leprosy was like. To be isolated and excluded also help us to understand how the leprous felt in those days. Both leprosy and COVID-19 must nowadays help us to know the effects of sinfulness. **All three** cause exclusion. We seek and desire acceptance. Just as the sick person seriously wants to be healed and set free, so does the sinful person desire to be forgiven and made clean. Not to desire cleanliness is to be spiritually numb, leading to deadness. Therefore, the psalmist today says: "Then I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I covered not. I confess my faults to the Lord, and you took away the guilt of my sin." (Ps. 32). To be forgiven is to be set free and that freedom is salvation.

(2) Christ's Religion Approach: "A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, "If you wish, you can make me clean ... I do will it. Be made clean." (Mk. 1:40f). **Pitiably he touched him. The leprosy left him and the Lord Jesus sent him to "go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed."** (Mk. 1:44). The leprous in today's gospel wanted acceptance. He wanted to be readmitted to the community, although he was contagious and "sinful". Jesus readmitted him. **Therefore**, Jesus came into this world not to perform individual cures on a few, but to offer salvation to all. As for sins, we can hide them. Can't we? But we cannot hide leprosy or COVID-19, so we call a doctor. Jesus is our spiritual doctor, the healer of our souls. Those who seek him will be healed. They will have their sins forgiven by God; and the priest will declare them clean. **In the ancient approach, the priest declared them unclean. In the Christian approach, the priest will declare the sinner clean. That's why the sinner goes to the priest for confession of sins. That's our role! We, the priests of Christ!**

(3) Breaking and Crossing the Barriers with Jesus: The Lord Jesus crossed the barriers when he reached out and touched the leprous. Leprosy and COVID-19 are similar except for sinfulness. The effects in community are same. For the health of the community the afflicted persons were excluded. Hear what Paul said: "Just as I try to please everyone in every way, ... that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1 Cor. 10:33-11:1). **Would that every priest, preacher, minister, healer and founders of churches and denominations imitate Christ and St. Paul, not seeking personal benefits!** But no! Many preachers and ministers want to own a private jet, own an estate, construct an

unrequired big church, construct unnecessary rectories, shrines, halls and chapels after their names, in every parish or city they are assigned. But many fail to feed the sheep and lamb with the word of God. To sit long hours hearing confession is tasking. True! **But Christians nowadays do not want confession, to show themselves to the priest. Yet we want to be forgiven.** The modern world may have to teach Jesus how to obtain forgiveness, and no longer the pattern he taught his Church. What an irony!

In Conclusion: As we celebrate Valentine's Day, Lover's Day, we appreciate many of you husbands and wives who genuinely love yourselves. Kudos! This love must be extended also to the children in the family. Let love reign! But for those marriage partners that cheat one another, faking love, hating and killing one another, choosing divorce instead of honoring their marriage vows; what happened to your initial love? Is this practice a new religious approach? Return to Christ's Religion Approach, that of forgiveness. Let us together expel the leprosy in our today's world, just as we together want to eradicate the coronavirus. Evil is being celebrated. The devil gave the world a very sweet and deceiving phrase. When people steal each other's partners in marriage and they go out to cheat, they call it "making love." That appears enticing, isn't it? Well, that is the devil's deceitful language that has enveloped the modern world; and the world of many celebrities. And their fake marriages and divorces are many times too! That too is a killer disease of our time.