

## 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time February 14, 2021

One of my favourite saints is Saint Francis of Assisi. I am intrigued with his life story. Having come from a wealthy family, Francis lived a life of luxury but was well known for his drinking and partying in his youth. Francis was chosen by God, however, for a different type of life. Following God's plan was not something Francis gave into easily and one of his fears was of catching leprosy. Francis conquered his fear and embraced the leper in love no matter how godforsaken that person was. Done in the context of divine trust and love, that faith-filled action set Francis free.

The leper in today's Gospel knows he is not supposed to be among the living. For in fact, to be a leper is to be one who is a walking dead person. Leprosy was a death sentence from which there was no cure. Lepers lived apart from the rest of society, to protect others from the disease, but in so doing were condemned to live a life of loneliness, fear, pain and misery.

Jesus was not repulsed by the leper but met him with compassion and mercy. The disease did not infect Jesus. Jesus was untouchable in this respect. What did touch Jesus was this man's faith and belief that he could be healed. The leper knew Jesus could give him his life back by essentially raising him from the dead.

This coming week, as we begin our Lenten journey, what do you ask of Jesus to be healed from? Is there a fear somewhere inside you that needs to be let go of? Perhaps there is something holding you back from making a commitment or offering to volunteer with a particular group? Perhaps you are afraid to see yourself as a child of God, worthy of His love for you, held back by sins you think are unforgivable.

Francis knew, in order to conquer his fear of the "flesh" and its many indulgences, he had to be ready to embrace the leper. So, what do you need to do this Lent to let go and conquer a fear you have? Just as the leper said to Jesus in the Gospel, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean."

Jesus came in compassion and mercy to take away what is holding us back and what we are helpless to get rid of. Does something have control over you? What is it in your life that you are unable to cleanse yourself of? Jesus can make you clean! All we must do is choose! Choose Jesus!

*Reflection by Julie de Gouw, Pastoral Minister*