



FEBRUARY 14, 2020 | 6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

HOLY FAMILY PARISH

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ADDRESSING THE REAL LEPROSY AND THE REAL ISOLATION

THE SCOURGE of the Ebola virus was one of the greatest health hazards along the West African coast. The virus is highly infectious and can kill in a very short time. To curb the rapid spread, governments of affected countries were strongly advised to isolate the infected. This directly called for the erection of *isolation wards* or units at designated places. Those who were confirmed as being infected by the virus had to stay together in one place away from those who are healthy.

Isolation can be a very harrowing and disgusting experience; in fact it could be devastating and dangerous. It involves one being separated from others on account of an identified challenge or lack. Another name for this is *quarantine*. At the height of the Ebola scourge in Liberia, for instance, something medically horrifying happened. Some youths attacked one of the major isolation units and freed about 29 confirmed Ebola patients. They also took away some items like mattresses and other things used by the patients. This act that compromised medical ethics escalated the spread of the virus because those who were affected and isolated got mixed up with the healthy people.

Today in the First Reading (Lev.13:1-2,44-46) and in the Gospel Reading (Mark 1:40-45) we are presented with an illness similar to Ebola, namely leprosy. The difference is that while Ebola is caused by one of the five strain of virus belonging to the family of *filoviridae* that affects the organs, causing internal and external

bleeding, leprosy is caused by a bacteria called *Mycobacterium leprae* that affects the skin, nerves, limbs and eyes.

Beginning with the First Reading we can see what can be described as a divine statement on leprosy. According to the recommendation given by God to Moses, Aaron and his children (the priests) have the prerogative of declaring someone a leper after a close examination of the skin whereby the individual is also isolated from the community. The individual remains outside the camp until he or she receives healing, which a priest also has to confirm.

The leper was meant to go through a very excruciating experience. Apart from the physical pain that could come from the illness, the individual also faces the psychological pain of isolation while outwardly bearing all the dehumanizing stamps of one who is unfit to dwell with others who are free from the illness. The situation is also spiritually chastising as the leper has to go about crying: "Unclean! Unclean!" A situation that is equal to one saying: "I am a sinner, I am a sinner!"

From what we have said, it is easy to identify the connection between leprosy and sin. In fact, during the time of Moses it was believed that whoever was infected by leprosy sinned in the first place. So sin could be said to be a precondition for leprosy, which in turn necessitates isolation from the rest of the people.

It becomes clear that the real leprosy is sin, not just the spot on the skin. This becomes the tenable ground that

brings about our isolation. Leprosy brings about spots on the skin causing discoloration and damages. In other but similar way, sin affects the soul causing spiritual discoloration and damage.

Added to these distortions, sin creates a barrier between us and God (Isaiah 59:2). This is where isolation comes in. Sin has a way of taking us outside God's camp as the lepers had to stay outside the camp of the Israelites. We become isolated when we are more concerned about personal gains and satisfaction than doing the will of God. According to Proverbs (18:1) the man who isolates himself (from God) seeks his selfish desire and despises wise judgement.

Isolation from God is highly destructive and dangerous for a number of reasons. When we are isolated from God we become vulnerable. When we are isolated from God we lose His graces and blessings. When we are isolated from God our lives become empty. Our Lord Jesus Christ made this clear when in the Gospel of St. John (15:5) he said: "cut off from me you can do nothing."

In the Gospel Reading today we are presented with a spectacular reversal of leprosy and isolation by our Lord Jesus Christ. We are told that a leper came to Jesus begging and kneeling and said: "If you will, you can make me clean." From this first scene we see the leper breaking the social norm or protocol which prevented lepers from having access to those who are not lepers. Social norms and protocols often stand between us and our goal or the point of our victory

and we need to get above them.

Next, the man submitted his condition to our Lord while believing in his ability when he said: “If you will, you can make me clean.” He was saying *if it pleases you make me clean because I know you can do so*. The point here is the man’s steadfast trust in the power of our Lord to change his situation. We can also observe that the man did not ask for healing but cleansing in the manner of David after his sin (Psalm 51:2). He was more concerned about his uncleanness than his illness. He went beyond his physical illness and asked for spiritual rebirth and by that got everything—healing and cleansing.

Now let us now look at the reaction of our Lord Jesus Christ to the request of the leper. We are told that he was first moved with pity. God is compassionate about our situations. God is not jubilant over our miseries and failures like some of us could be over the situations of others. God is rather compassionate and loving. David calls him God of mercy and compassion (Psalm 51:1). From this compassionate backdrop, our Lord Jesus Christ declared his readiness to assist the man and, touching him, he was cured and made clean.

Here we also see our Lord Jesus breaking the social norms and protocols in order to effect healing and cleansing. This is not the only place Jesus will break protocols in order to give a helping hand—recall the healing on the Sabbath day (Mark 3:1-6).

Finally, our Lord Jesus Christ asked the man to tell no one about what happened but to go and show himself to the priest. We are told the man went about announcing what happened to everyone. The leper made whole suddenly became a carrier of the good news without official

commissioning. But those of us who are baptized and commissioned to spread the word prefer to stay silent.

Going back to our point, the real leprosy is sin and the real isolation is being cut away from God. In our limitedness we often fall into sin and get disconnected or isolated from God. The episode in the Gospel Reading is a pertinent assurance to us that there is a remedy of this situation and this can be found in Jesus Christ.

For the above to happen the person involved needs to go come to Jesus like the leper. Going to Jesus will offer the individual the opportunity of being touched by the Lord and being reintegrated. If we remain unmoved our situation will not be moved. There were surely many lepers in their settlement but one person decided to come to our Lord.

We also notice with interest the place of the priest in the entire drama. From the First Reading, the priest is the functionary that confirms one a leper, he also confirms one cleansed just as our Lord mentioned in the Gospel Reading today. This actually points to the sanctifying office of the priest. The priest stands between God and the people; appropriately called *Alter Christus* (another Christ).

By asking the leper to go to the priest our Lord evidently confirms the work of the priest as the eye and mouthpiece of God. From this episode we can gain a deeper understanding of the work of the priest in the sacrament of penance where individuals receive forgiveness for their sins and are reconciled with God after a period of sinfulness and isolation.

It is commonly said that prevention is better than cure. For us to safeguard ourselves from the leprosy of sin and the isolation from God St. Paul in the Second Reading (1 Cor.10:31-

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OFFICE MANAGER/ BOOKKEEPER

Lydia St. Peter

OFFICE HOURS

Mon–Fri 9:30AM – 2:30PM

Please call the parish office to make arrangements for the **Sacraments of Baptism, Anointing of the Sick or Holy Matrimony** as well as funerals. **Reconciliation** is available from 30 minutes before a scheduled Mass.

MASS TIMES

SATURDAY

4PM – St. Joseph’s

6PM – St. Mary’s

SUNDAY

9AM – St. Elizabeth’s

11:30AM – St. Theresa’s

MON | WED | FRI

10AM – St. Theresa’s

Cover image:

Christ Healing the Mother of Simon Peter’s Wife by John Bridges, 1839

11:1) advised us to do whatever we have to do to the glory of God. This is a very simple and productive formula. It involves constantly asking ourselves if what we are about to do will be to the glory of God or not.

As we launch into a brand new week let us be conscious of the leprosy of sin which has the capacity of bringing about our isolation from God. May God’s word be forever active in our souls. Happy Sunday.

THE SOURCE OF ART AND BEAUTY

JOHN HORVAT II, *The Catholic Thing*



PARIS IS the City of Light, full of spectacle, beauty, and art. Yet in these dreary times of coronavirus lockdown, the theaters and concert halls are silent and dark. Artistic beauty finds no refuge from the draconian restrictions that constrain the body and stifle the soul.

The New York Times culture critic in Paris, Laura Cappelle, recently sought to fill the cultural void. She found solace in what she called the only authentic cultural event now re-allowed by authorities – the Catholic Mass. Indeed, she claims the Catholic Mass expressed by tradition in the city’s magnificent

churches is the only setting where art can repose unperturbed. It is “the only show in town.”

Of course, the Mass is not a show, but there is something profound about her affirmation. The Church teaches that the Mass is an act of worship by which Catholics fulfill their obligation to adore God. Many times, the faithful do not realize the sublime beauty or the cultural richness expressed by the Mass. Sometimes it takes the eyes of an avowed nonbeliever to help worshipers appreciate the treasures in their midst.

Traditionally, the Church has done everything possible to appeal to humanity’s aesthetic sense. The primary aim of liturgy is God’s public worship, but that activity also produces intense beauty. Before modern innovations intervened, the Church’s ancient liturgies were spectacles of poetic expression and solemn ritual.

Everything liturgical has meaning and purpose that teaches the truths of the Faith with great dignity and seriousness. Choral arrangements are composed having in mind heavenly joys, not earthly bliss. The Church understood that the beauty of her liturgy was an occasion for grace to act upon souls so that they might better know, love, and serve the Blessed Trinity.

Thus, Ms. Cappelle’s search for art and beauty at Mass makes sense, limited though it might be. She is drawn to the “elaborate costumes, choreographed flourishes, and live music” that she found when attending Masses celebrated at several Parisian parishes. At the church of St.-Sulpice, she was particularly struck by a pre-dawn Rorate Mass that starts in darkness, illuminated only by candlelight, and ends with the first rays of the sun peeking through the windows. Celebrated during Advent, the Rorate

Mass symbolizes the Light of Christ, which dawns shortly after on Christmas Day.

Unfortunately, the author's perspective is restricted to the esthetic sphere, in which she circulates. Her standard of comparison is solely theater and the performing arts. She is impressed, however, by "the ritualistic nature of the event, the dramatic buildup from scene to scene – even the slightly labored monologues." She witnesses a wide range of styles from warm and simple intimacy to "old-school pomp, with full processions and choreographed genuflections." The Church understands art and therefore masters that dramatic tension found in the "push and pull between performance and solemnity, flamboyance and restraint."

The music at the churches also enchants with a wide variety of choirs and organists. The acoustics of the ancient churches and their fine organs provide an atmosphere for the appreciation of classical composers and sacred music. The author is exposed to Gregorian chant, which she describes as "a sacred, virtuosic form" from the Middle Ages, which expresses "unshowy beauty."

The art critic also observes those attending the service, whom she finds surprisingly young. All is peaceful and meditative as those present mix "quiet reflection and togetherness" in their soaring search for union with God. These various elements come together to present an otherworldly experience that touches the sublime.

The greatest spectacle for her was at the parish of St.-Roch, known as the "church of artists." What draws the artists there is the celebration of the traditional Latin Tridentine Mass in all its splendor. The author is amazed at the over 400 people she finds at the church, the largest crowd she has seen indoors since the pandemic began.

At this Mass, she comes the closest to having a reli-

gious experience, commenting that she "was moved, at Mass, by the love and devotion I recognized in many attendees." She quickly likened it, however, to similar feelings she experiences at the theater. Nevertheless, the Mass struck a deep chord. She defends the churchgoers against critics in the secular arts who think churches should be locked down: "there is no reason to begrudge believers their worship."

Laura Cappelle's report has lessons for Catholics.

The first is that the Church's traditional splendor is extremely attractive to postmodern souls. Through her, even *The New York Times* records the sublime beauty found in the ancient liturgy. The report refutes the myths about the unattractiveness of the traditional Church. Indeed, the author is surprised to find young people and artists drawn to the Mass. Catholics would do well to take notice. Many people might convert to the Faith if exposed to the grand apostolate of beauty.

Secondly, what attracts people to the Church is not social-justice sermons, dreary contemporary music, or cheap imitations of the modern world. People are searching for authenticity, certainties, and truth. The art of the Church expresses profound doctrines, firm teaching, and long tradition. When truth and moral goodness intermingle, they give forth a beauty that cannot fail to speak to those seeking God. Only the Church can quench the insatiable thirst for the sublime that is so much a part of human nature.

Finally, a return to beauty is only possible with a return to God, about whom Saint Augustine wrote: "Too late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new. Too late I have loved thee." The postmodern world is rapidly exhausting itself. Let's hope that – soon – a chastened humanity will come to see the foolishness of abandoning the ways of beauty and will take those words of the saint to heart.

mass intentions

Date Intention

2/6 SATURDAY

4PM Ralph Cole † | Rayburn Minton

6PM

2/7 SUNDAY

9AM Rosalee & Mike Rocchetti | Pete Danko †

11:30AM Rita Momma Louise †

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please pray for

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 Gerry Hankins
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 Clarence Moore
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 Paris Whisher
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OUTSIDE DONATIONS—THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Hampton, VA donor: **\$150**

Donations Received as of February 7 (Week 32)		
CHURCH	ATTENDANCE	RECEIVED
St. Joseph's	10	\$207
St. Elizabeth's		
St. Mary's	9	\$1,310
St. Theresa's	20	\$785
Total Offertory	38	\$2,3402
Outside Donations		\$150
Year to Date Received		\$74,592
Goal		\$70,769
Ahead/Behind Goal		+\$3,823

Mass continues to be livestreamed Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 10AM from St. Theresa's and the church will be open for anyone who wishes to attend in person. **Masks are mandatory!** The 11:30AM Sunday Mass at St. Theresa's will also continue to be livestreamed for those who are not yet able to join us in person.

Every Wednesday evening at 7PM, Fr. Eric leads us in a study of Sacred Scripture. This will be an ongoing series, with occasional breaks. We are currently studying the Gospel of Matthew. Why not start a new relationship with the Word! Come in person or join us on Facebook. Questions and comments will always be welcome!

ANNUAL DIOCESAN APPEAL

As we prepare to celebrate "Presidents' Day" holiday, it is important to remember the deep faith of our founding fathers. On October 3, 1789, George Washington gave a Presidential Proclamation to acknowledge God and offer "thanksgiving" to him. The proclamation stated, in part, "...it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor" — and "to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God..."

And, we are all familiar with the greatness of Abraham Lincoln, whose purpose was to free the slaves and heal

a nation. In his second inaugural address on March 4, 1865, he stated, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan..."

These are examples of their faith in and reverence for God. This week, as we celebrate them and celebrate LOVE through St. Valentine's Day, let's remember the work of charity, kindness and love that is accomplished through the Annual Diocesan Appeal, as well. Please make your pledge today.

As we prepare for St. Valentine's Day and the Presidents' Day holidays, let us remember the love we share and the deep faith of our founding fathers as we make our pledge to the Annual Diocesan Appeal. Holy Family Parish wishes to thank Will and the parishioners of St. Michael's in Glen Allen for donating hoodies and childrens books! These will be distributed to area students in need. **Thank you** for your always wonderful generosity!

ASH WEDNESDAY MASS TIMES



ST. MARY'S — 12PM

ST. ELIZABETH'S — 3PM

ST. THERESA'S — 6PM

birthdays & anniversaries:

FEBRUARY

BIRTHDAYS—18: Karl Lewis | 19: Donna Lambert

ANNIVERSARIES—17: Ralph & Jackie Shawver

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