

Sixth Sunday of the Year – February 14, 2021

Leviticus 13: 1-2, 44-46 – 1 Corinthians 10: 31 – 11:1 – Mark 1: 40-45

Jesus told the man with leprosy to do what Moses prescribed. What that was we heard from the first reading from the Book of Leviticus. Restrictions on an individual afflicted with leprosy were demanding. A distancing from other persons and, in fact, from the whole community, was required. It is easy to understand these restrictions because of the very nature of the disease. Leprosy was considered to be a very visible sign of sinfulness. It was identified with the plagues of Egypt which included boils which appeared on the skins of the Egyptians. The boils were viewed as a sign of the rejection of God's call to allow the Chosen People to leave their slavery. Thus leprosy was considered a very evident sign of an individual's sinfulness and rejection of God. It signified not only a physical affliction but also a spiritual one as well.

The inclusion of this incident in the Gospel of Mark is somewhat unusual. In the beginning parts of his gospel, he emphasizes that Jesus was being surrounded by many followers, or even crowds of people. In contrast, in this instance, Jesus encounters the man with leprosy on a one-on-one basis. Jesus is not only present to this person, he actually touches him, a gesture that was strictly forbidden. In a merciful way, Jesus looks with pity on the man and, in touching him, Jesus goes beyond what he had done in previous miracles.

This story suggests asking ourselves two questions. Where and how is Christ encountered? What ought we keep in mind about living out and practicing what we believe?

We encounter Christ in the midst of our own lives, day-to-day, even in the ugly rather than in the world where everything is right and beautiful and attractive. We encounter Christ in weakness, sinfulness, failure – as in the man afflicted with leprosy. We encounter Christ not simply in success such as the wonder or miracles displayed but also as learned from the gospels, in the ugliness of betrayal, condemnation and execution on a cross. We encounter Christ in a direct way, even in physical contact, such as in the sacramental way in which we touch, we see, we hear when we come together as a community at worship.

The encounter of Jesus with the man with leprosy and his restoration by Jesus not only to his physical health but also to the community as a whole encourages us, once again, to go forth from this time of reflection, prayer and worship of God restored and renewed in our faith so that we can announce in our lives a confident love and trust in a good and gracious God.