

2021- 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Feb 13 &14.

The Lord Jesus makes us clean and whole.

"I do will it. Be made clean" (Mark 1:40).

Dear brothers and sisters, Job's lamentation in the first reading last Sunday reveals the situation of Man before the coming of Christ. Our Lord's healing of Peter's mother in-law and countless other people who encountered the Lord, shows the difference His coming made. This Sunday's first reading and gospel show a deeper dimension of this truth. The healing of the leper reveals our Lord as God. He is the one who makes us clean and whole. In the ancient world, only God can heal. Man cannot achieve this on his own. This healing our Lord performed takes care of the whole man, body and soul. Healing of the leper is not merely physiological. It is spiritual as well.

Leprosy was not considered merely a bodily ailment but a spiritual one as well. God clearly stated: "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. If the man is leprous and unclean, the priest shall declare him unclean by reason of the sore on his head" (Leviticus 13:1). Such an afflicted person was banished and shunned from interaction with other members of his community. He had to live outside the camp. Such a person, "Shall keep his garments rent and his head bare, and shall muffle his beard and shall cry out, Unclean, unclean(Leviticus 13:44-46). A leper is a living dead.

Direct intervention from God is the hope of such a person. However, he was not even allowed to enter the temple because he was unclean. He was forbidden to mingle, touch or be touched by other people. It was a desperate attempt for that leper to approach the Lord as he did. That man afflicted with leprosy seemed to understand that Jesus is our great high priest who is able to sympathize with us - "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help" (Hebrew 4:14-16). Braving the restrictions that forbade him from reaching out for help, the man prostrated himself before Jesus crying out, "If you wish, you can make me clean" (Mark 1:40).

The miracle happened as soon as the Lord said to the leper, "I do will it, be made clean" (Mark 1:40) His leprosy was gone! The Bible says, "The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean" (Mark 1:41). This man's healing brought to an end his banishment, alienation and misery. Since leprosy was indicative of the sickness of the soul, healing from it meant the forgiveness of sin and reinstatement. The joy of the moment is captured by the refrain in responsorial Psalm today. "I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation" (Psalm 32:7). Describing in detail what transpired between the healed man and God, the Psalmist continued, "Blessed is he whose fault is taken away, whose sin is covered. Blessed the man to whom the LORD imputes not guilt, in whose spirit there is no guile. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I covered not. I said, "I confess my faults to the LORD," and you took away the guilt

of my sin" (Psalm 32:1-4). The man who was healed fitted this condition.

The healing of the leper reveals the compassion of God who stops at nothing to bring us redemption. By touching the leper, the Lord swapped places with the man. The man who was banished could now mingle with the community of his people, while the Lord went into seclusion. Because the man could not contain his joy, he publicized what the Lord had done for him "so that it was impossible for Jesus to openly enter a town. He remained outside in deserted places" (Mark 1:45). The holy One came into contact with the man's uncleanness and misery and dispelled them.

What is the point of all this? What are we supposed to do? The Lord's attitude to that banished and shunned man teaches us to do likewise. We are invited to reach out to the forgotten, the stigmatized and the vulnerable. "Brothers and sisters, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God. Avoid giving offense, whether to the Jews or Greeks or the Church of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

That man with leprosy is a symbol of all of us. Before the Lord, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). How awesome is the sacrament of confession through which we get cleansed? How often do we go to Confession? Do we sometimes create unhealthy dichotomies in our spiritual life? Do we claim to confess directly to God so feel that we do not need to confess before a priest? When we are tempted to think in terms of "either or," we must remember his words, "Go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your

cleansing what Moses prescribed" (Mark 1:44). Is it not eye-opening that God himself sent the healed man to the priest? The Lord makes us clean and whole through the ministry of his priests. There is always a balm in Gilead. "Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones"(Isaiah 49:13).