

Homily. 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. B. 13/14 February 2021

Well, there's not much to that gospel story is there? Yes it is simple, but I suggest deceptively so. What we know is that Jesus and His first few disciples had begun walking around the small towns and villages of Galilee, preaching the Good News, healing the sick and freeing people oppressed by various evil spirits. Somewhere on this journey a man, more to the point a leper, came up to Jesus begging for His help saying, 'If you want to, you can cure me.' This was a shocking thing to have happen. As the Old Testament reading indicated lepers had to stay clear of the rest of the population, living in places no one went near.

In our society people with Covid must stay apart from everyone else. If they break out of quarantine they risk severe penalties. In Jesus time, a leper moving forwards to contact someone risked a beating and even death. Nevertheless, this leper took such a risk. Somehow he must have heard of Jesus and the healings He was working, concluding with faith that if Jesus wanted to help him then He could cure even the incurable. Jesus response to this man was decidedly odd, too. St. Mark takes pains to tell us that Jesus was deeply moved by compassion for the man and his plight, taking the forbidden step of reaching out and touching him while saying 'Of course I want to. Be cured.'

Who would do such a thing today? Only Doctors, nurses and health care professionals, along with Clergy and various religious ministers. True, but let's not overlook those many unsung people who clean rooms and surfaces, take food to those in quarantine, pick up their mess and wash their contaminated clothes. They do all of this aware of the risk of

contagion even when families and friends are excluded from such intimacy, such danger. Can things go wrong when people like these have close contact with those infected? Most certainly, because we've all seen and heard over these past 11 months of caring, helping workers becoming pandemic victims themselves. Some have suffered serious illness for their efforts and more than a few have died of Covid 19 while doing as Jesus did. And it is what He did, leaning in to the leper, touching him, speaking hope and healing into his ears. Jesus went even further, guiding the man into having his healing approved by the authorities of the time who would then let him to re-connect with his family and society.

Jesus asked only that the man not tell anyone about how his healing had come about and who it was that had spoken, touched and healed him. This the man didn't do because he simply couldn't stay silent. He was overcome by such a miracle cure of kindness and compassion. The upshot was that Jesus was forced to quarantine Himself until it was certain that He was disease free. Still, people risked all by seeking Him out, for the needy will always be drawn to hearts of mercy and hope.

As I said earlier, a deceptively simple story, yet one that's taking flesh, being lived and practiced today in our own time of plague. St. Paul said to us that he didn't seek his own benefit, but that of everyone else so that many might be saved. He urges us to imitate him as he initiated Christ. That's all we have to do, nothing more. With God's gracious help we will do so, being nothing less for those who need us now to help them.