

February 15, 2009

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Reading 1

[Lv 13:1-2, 44-46](#)

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron,
"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.
"The one who bears the sore of leprosy
shall keep his garments rent and his head bare,
and shall muffle his beard;
he shall cry out, 'Unclean, unclean!'
As long as the sore is on him he shall declare himself unclean,
since he is in fact unclean.
He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp."

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 32:1-2, 5, 11](#)

R. (7) I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

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.

R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

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.

R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you just;
exult, all you upright of heart.

R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

Reading II

[1 Cor 10:31-11:1](#)

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,
just as I try to please everyone in every way,
not seeking my own benefit but that of the many,
that they may be saved.
Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Gospel

[Mk 1:40-45](#)

A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said,
"If you wish, you can make me clean."
Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand,
touched him, and said to him,
"I do will it. Be made clean."
The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean.
Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once.
He said to him, "See that you tell no one anything,
but go, show yourself to the priest
and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed;
that will be proof for them."
The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter.
He spread the report abroad
so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly.
He remained outside in deserted places,
and people kept coming to him from everywhere.

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HOMILY

Every community has familiar stories that are told time and time again. These stories communicate events long past, invite people into a common history, and convey messages that are particularly important. Every family has stories that are told whenever it gathers. As the stories are told the family reunites, people reconnect, and a pattern of being together emerges. This pattern of being together provides stability and comfort. We know how the stories end; we have heard them all before.

If we are honest with ourselves we must admit that at times we they are so familiar that we don't want to hear them again. We've all experienced that with an aging parent or relative who tells the same stories time and time again. We have heard the story so many times before we find ourselves sitting there wanting to jump to the story's conclusion. At these times we tend to stop listening. Too often that happens when we hear scripture passages that are familiar. We stop listening; we jump to the conclusion of the story, and hear a message that is most familiar.

Today's Gospel passage is familiar to each person hear. Each of us has heard this passage proclaimed and listened to the accompanying homily. The homily goes something like this. Jesus dared to reach out to the Leper making himself unclean. There are people within our contemporary society who, like the Leper are deemed unclean. The homeless, persons suffering from HIV/AIDS, immigrants ... well, you know the list; you've heard the homily before. The homily concludes with a moral task. We, like Jesus whom we follow, are to reach out to those who are deemed unclean by society are to reach out and invite them into the mainstream of the community even if we risk becoming unclean.

There is nothing wrong with this interpretation of the scripture passage. This interpretation, however, is incomplete. This reading of the scripture passage concentrates on our action. It concludes with something we are compelled to do without addressing adequately the healing action of God and the consequences of this healing. To address adequately the healing action of God we have to listen to the reading anew and pay attention to some of the details that too often recede into the background; details that indicate the consequences of the healing.

Leprosy in the Jewish community excluded an individual from Temple worship as well as from social community. An individual who suffered from this affliction could not bring sacrifices to the Temple, they could not join in communal prayer, they could not worship God. Their relationship with God was impeded because they could not join the community in prayer and worship. In healing the Leper Jesus enabled the man to return to worship, restored him to the religious community, and thus reconciled his relationship with God. The man was to go and show himself to the priests so that he could return to worship. The consequence of his healing was far greater than simply a return to the social community. Furthermore, in healing the Leper Jesus indicated what his mission was to accomplish. Remember, we are in at the beginning of the Gospel ~ still in the first chapter. Jesus has cast out demons indicating that he is engaging in a struggle that transcends the physical world, cured Simon Peter's mother-in-law freeing her to serve, and now heals this man so he can worship God in the context of the Jewish community.

This reconsideration of this short story emphasis the mission of Jesus, the consequences of his mission, and a wider response required of disciples than simply going forth and ministering to those who are marginalized within our communities. The emphasis is on God's action. Our actions are in response to the action of God and transcend social activity to include worship within the context of the Christian community.

It is through the action of Jesus Christ that we are made worthy to worship God, just as the Leper was made worthy to return to the temple. It is through our connection with one another in worship that we enter more deeply into the mystery of the Christian community ~ the Body of Christ. This deeper communion with one another is integral to our conversion through which we are compelled to act within our world. The emphasis, however, is not on our action. The emphasis is on the action of God and our increasing awareness of what God is accomplishing within us. We are the ones who are restored, redeemed, and made worthy to gather around this table to celebrate and receive God's presence in Word and Sacrament. This is a transformative event through which we are made worthy.

We are compelled to gather to worship our God, that we might enter more deeply into the mystery of God's life, that we might be transformed, and then go out as disciples within our society. Certainly that includes welcoming the stranger and reaching beyond the boundaries of clean and unclean within or society. It begins, however, in recognizing that we ourselves must be healed, made clean, redeemed, and transformed. And so we gather as a people unworthy to approach and worship our God. We gather as people who have called by God, who are humbled by this invitation, and who place ourselves upon this altar with the bread and wine that the gifts offer made become a worthy and acceptable sacrifice to our loving Father.

It is only with the assurance that we are made worthy can we worship and then forth and in the name of Jesus continue His mission, build His kingdom, and live lives that transcend boundaries, offer hope, and express the love of God for all of our brothers and sisters.

Rev. Joseph Benedict