

Homily, Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time "B"  
Cathedral of SS. Peter and Paul  
February 11 - 12, 2012  
Rev. Noah J. Casey

Beginning with the First Sunday of March, and continuing on the first Sunday of each month at 5:00 PM, I will lead those who wish in the ancient practice of praying the words of the Bible known as Lectio Divina. It is a restful, non-intrusive approach to praying the sacred scriptures. In place of the usual style of preaching today, I wanted to give you a taste of this kind of prayer. I invite you to rest in the present of God and the Word of Life. Let us begin: ***O God, have spoken your Word to us. Walk with us as we reflect on its meaning and message. Help us to pray. Help us to listen to You. Amen.***

Moved with pity.....touched the man.....spoke healing words. These actions and words of the Lord Jesus reach out and touch our own spirits today as we embrace this poignant story of the healing of the leper. They are made all the more significant when we consider the context of Jesus' day. Lepers may have moved some to pity, but most often people coming anywhere near a leper were full of fear. Leprosy, what we call today, "Hanson's Disease", was not understood at all in the world at the time of Jesus. Surrounded by a lack of medical awareness, accurate diagnosis and no real treatment, the leper was to not to come into any kind of social contact with others, was to sew bells on his or her clothing so as to alert others in the area, and was directed to shout out, "unclean, unclean". These indictments were familiar to all from the Book of Leviticus in our first reading today. They were the sad commentary on a sad disease. What a horrible way to move through life! Alienated from family

and friends, the leper lived in lonely isolation, starving for human kindness and thirsting for the waters of compassion.

***Let us pray: there are some around us who walk alone as you walked to Calvary with no one to accompany them. Maybe we ourselves are those persons. Let us know, loving Lord, that you are our faithful companion, and that you seek us out with your love, with your healing.***

***Pray now in the quiet of your hearts. (Pause)***

In the midst of all this, the Lord Jesus not only is moved with pity, but, to the shock of everyone, actually reaches out to touch the leprous man rendering Himself unclean, and risking social rejection for Himself. That touch did more than heal; that touch broke through all social conventions of the day. That touch physically and symbolically reconnected the leper with the human experience, and through Jesus, with the human community. That touch reaffirmed the leprous man's own humanity, and offered a restored channel of grace, mercy and healing connecting him once again to the world from which he had been alienated.

***Let us pray: our fragile human nature longs for your touch, Lord Jesus. Our fear of rejection leads us to separate ourselves from You and others in the community. Reach out to us, Jesus. Let your touch restore our hearts.***

***Pray now in the quiet of your hearts. (Pause)***

Communication with a leper was for all intents and purposes forbidden and dreaded. Communication presupposes a desire on our part to want to relate to one another, to share some part of our lives with one another. No one sought out a leper for relationship. Their plight was to sit in dark despair alone and lonely for the length of their miserable life. Left to

themselves....left to their deformities, rotting limbs and stench, lepers lived in a hell in this world rather than in the world to come.

Into this alienation, Jesus seeks to communicate healing through words of compassion. “I do will it; Be made clean!” Can you begin to imagine the shock of these words, their boldness, the spark of hope ignited in the heart of this diseased man?

***Let us pray: How we long for your words of kindness, Lord.***

***How we long for friendship to which You invite us. Help us to be open to your words of life, and not be afraid to receive them.***

***Pray now in the quiet of your hearts. (Pause)***

The apostle Paul calls us to a different way of life in the First Letter to the Corinthians. He declares: “Avoid giving offense, whether to the Jews or the Greeks or the church of God.” Paul calls us to imitate Christ Jesus.

If we are to be imitators of Christ, then we must adopt his sense of compassion, His desire to touch in a healing manner and to speak words that heal and not destroy. His way of communicating must become our way of living in this world. We are called to break through social barriers of our own day be they barriers of racial prejudice, social mistrust or greed. We are called to offer the same compassion that we would desire for ourselves, and even more that Christ gives us all the time under any circumstance even if it means risking social alienation and rejection. Our touch must be the touch of human respect that restores human dignity rather than pushing away. That kind of touch is needed in our families of origin that at times can nurture old hurts and disappointments, as well as in the larger human family where weapons of war and destruction are touted as solutions to problems and social ills. Our words must be words that offer the gentler side of speaking rather than the mad rush of vulgar and

hasty judgement. Words are tools for building the new Kingdom of Christ rather than weapons that break down the human family and add to social chaos.

***Let us pray: Healing Christ, anoint us with the compassion, the touch and the words of new life. Help us who receive these gifts from you share them freely with others and show your healing presence to the world.***

***Pray now in the quiet of your hearts. (Pause)***

Be imitators of Christ. Have compassion. Touch with respect. Speak with kindness. And above all, as St. Paul bids us, do everything for the glory of God. **Amen!**