

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2009

Our God is merciful, compassionate and righteous in his judgment. He does not make a distinction between people by separating the rich from the poor, the good from the bad and the healthy from the sick. Each one counts for him and, likewise, each one is welcomed by him according to his needs. That is what today's readings try to teach us.

The first reading describes one of the most frightening diseases of the time, namely leprosy, and its consequence on the life on the sick. In fact, it was believed in ancient times that disease and illness were a consequence of sin and, therefore, a punishment from God. Following such a conception, when someone had leprosy, his social situation was worse than one can imagine. More than with any other disease, the fate of a leper was really harsh.

As described in the first reading, the leper was banished from society and forced to live apart, outside the city in an isolated camp, as it was once on the island of Molokai in Hawaii. Given the contagion of the disease and its religious interpretation, the leper was considered an unclean person and prohibited from joining other people in prayer or to perform any activity involving people until the healing would have been officially attested by a priest.

Given such a particular circumstance, the leper had not only to bear the physical pain of his disease, but he also had to bear the mental anguish and the heartbreak of being completely banished and rejected from human society.

All that can help us understand the reaction of Jesus in today's Gospel. Jesus positions himself against any exclusion and welcomes the leper. By touching him, Jesus offers him the healing he was seeking for many years and without which he would have forever remained an outcast and a pariah in society.

By healing this excluded person from society who had leprosy, Jesus teaches us that with him a new era has come where God takes on himself the suffering of his people, and where nobody is excluded before God because of his physical or mental situation. Because his Father in heaven is compassionate toward his creatures, Jesus has compassion on the leper and wants to put an end to his miserable situation. By his gesture, Jesus challenges us to be like him, that is, to be touched by the misery and the suffering of our fellow humans and, consequently, to take prompt actions in response to their problems.

By healing the leper and sending him to see the priest, Jesus is destroying the wall that divides people. Those who exclude others from their circle of life are concerned only with the external appearance of these people like their disease, the color of their skin, their origin or their background. But God looks at the heart, at what is invisible to the eyes and which does not appear at first glance. The worst disease someone can have is not physical, but spiritual. Sin is more destructive than human disease, because if someone loses his eternal life, there is nothing else he can do to save himself.

That is why the physical cleansing of the leper Jesus performs points to the interior healing that reconciles someone with his God. Beyond our healthy

appearance, we all need that reconciliation with our God through the Sacrament of confession, because we are spiritually sick.

By healing the leper Jesus establishes him in his dignity as a human being and a son of God who has the same rights as anybody else. To be human is to be human; whatever might be our physical or mental condition. This point is crucial and invites us to respect anyone who is physically and mentally diminished because of disease, like the handicapped, paralyzed, the elderly, etc. We are not only a society or a community of the healthy, but we have also the sick, the elderly, and the diminished.

We who are in good shape have the duty to care for them, to pay attention to them, to be patient with them, to accept them and to tolerate them in spite of their diminished condition. These people remind us that we, who are healthy, are lucky to be in good shape; and for that we have to be thankful to God. But, they also remind us of the vulnerability of the human condition. Perhaps today we are in good shape and everything works well with us, but who knows what can happen to us tomorrow?

By healing the leper and sending him to see the priest, Jesus is recognizing the importance of the established religious structure. That religious structure today is the Church. The Church is the space where we come together as God's people to worship and praise the Lord as we receive his blessing through listening to the word and the reception of the Sacraments. It is unfortunate that some people think and find it okay to stay home and pray in their room without joining their brothers and sisters in prayer. They forget that any isolation will eventually weaken them in their faith.

Another point I have to say is that by sending this guy to see the priest, Jesus is obeying the law and wants him likewise to obey the law. There is no doubt that, as God, Jesus is above any law. And yet, he obeys the law and wants us to do so. What Jesus wants to tell us is that our freedom as Christians should not become a kind of libertinage that eventually becomes an occasion of scandal or a fall for our fellows. That is exactly what St Paul says in the second reading.

Christian freedom is the ability and the possibility of serving our brothers and sisters for the glory of God. As Christians, we should seek the glory of God, by always acting with the best of intentions. Let me finish by recalling these words of St Basil: "When you sit down to eat, pray. When you eat bread, do so thanking him for being so generous to you. If you drink wine, be mindful of him who has given it to you for your pleasure and as a relief in sickness. When you dress, thank him for his kindness in providing you with clothes". May God bless you in his compassion and mercy!

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



Homily Date: February 15, 2009

© 2008 – Fr. Dr. Felicien Ilunga Mbala

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20090215homily.pdf