

Sixth Sunday in O. T. B/2018

The readings of this Sunday focus on human integration. They show that where human beings create division among themselves and exclude one another because of status or disease, God offers healing, integration and restoration to human dignity. They invite us to entrust our lives to God who is capable of healing us and giving us back our life in full integrity.

The first reading describes the prescriptions that Moses and Aaron gave to the people of Israel concerning the existence of leprosy. It shows that the sickness has to be witnessed by the spiritual leaders of the community. It also shows that the lepers were excluded from the community until the healing was attested by a priest.

What is behind this text is the truth that in ancient Israel, some diseases like leprosy were very difficult to cope with. Another idea is the truth that Israel was both a civil and religious society. Finally, there is the truth that the religious dimension of Israeli society had an ascendancy on the civil perception.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus heals a leper. First of all, the Gospel starts with the request of the leper asking Jesus for healing. Then, it talks about the reaction of Jesus who healed him. After that, it talks about the silence Jesus imposed on him and his recommendation that he shows up to the priest and offer the prescribed offering. The Gospel ends with the publicity of the healed leper over the whole matter.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about the joy of healing and the grace of integration. In fact, in order to appreciate the healing in today's Gospel, we have to understand the psychology of the disease and what is going on in the mind of the sick person.

Most of the time, when someone is sick, many things go on in his head and many questions arise from his mind about the outcome of his life and his possible future. While some diseases are curable, others are incurable, and therefore, seem to be terminal. However, whatever might be the gravity or the insignificance of a disease, it is always an object of concern. This concern becomes more preponderant when the disease is incurable.

This was exactly the case with the leprosy as described in the book of Leviticus. The one who had it was in a very difficult situation. Beside the fact that the disease was incurable, the leper was considered impure and excluded from taking part in the normal functioning of society. Given such a particular circumstance, the leper had not only to bear the physical pain of his disease, but also the psychological anguish and the heartbreak of being banished and rejected from human society.

When such a man was healed, he was certainly very happy because of the transformation that happened in his life. From being marginalized and outcast, he became an integrated citizen with rights and dignity.

While the Law of Moses prescribed to run away from such persons, Jesus went even to touch him and treat him with respect and love. That is the reason why the leper could not stop talking about his healing in spite of Jesus' recommendation not to.

I believe that by healing the leper, Jesus established him in his dignity of son of God. For that reason, we have to understand that a human person, whatever might be his physical or mental condition, remains always a human person. It is even our duty, we who are healthy, to respect anyone who is physically or mentally incapacitated, like the handicapped, the paralyzed and the elderly. We should always remember that we are not only a society of the healthy people, but also of the sick who deserve all our respect and love.

That is why we, who are in good shape, have the duty to care for the sick, 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 reason we have to be thankful to God. But, they also remind us of the fragility 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?

Moreover, by healing the leper and touching him, Jesus challenges us to be like him, that is, to be touched by the suffering of our fellows, to show compassion and be ready to take action in response to their problems.

Jesus also teaches us inclusion instead of exclusion. He wants to tell us that he has come in order to destroy the barriers that separate people and to set an example we have to follow, namely that there is no one that God excludes before him because of his physical appearance or the color of his skin or the accent of his language. All are his children and he loves them in the same way and without distinction.

Let us ask Jesus to heal us too from our own sickness, psychic and spiritual. The leprosy of the body is the visible face of sickness, but the spiritual sickness is invisible to the eyes. We really need the spiritual healing whose physical cleansing of the leper is the symbol. Let us open ourselves to God's cleansing. May Jesus touch our hearts so that together we work for the integration of the marginalized and the excluded of society! God bless you all!

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

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