

WSC REFLECTION GUIDE

Readings: Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46
Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 11
1Corinthians 10:31-11:1
Mark 1: 40-45

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 12, 2012

Word: The Lord keeps His covenant with those who follow His ways.

Theme: We follow God's ways when we lead others to Christ.

Promise: *"Blessed is he whose fault is take away, whose sin is covered."*

(Ps 32:1)

Reflection:

In a little while, we shall be entering a significant period in our Christian calendar, the Lenten Season. An appropriate message from the readings on the 6th Sunday of Ordinary Time sets us on the right path towards the proper personal behavior and spiritual disposition. To understand these, the first reading, Leviticus, gives us an idea of how lepers are treated in Israel at the time of Jesus. Leprosy is a chronic infectious disease that results in festering wounds and deformities on the face and limbs. Considered unclean, lepers were shunned, stigmatized and set apart. They lived in isolation, away from the rest of society. Only when they are proven to have been cleansed are they restored and allowed to rejoin the community. In Psalm 32 we get a spiritual insight into the meaning of a leper's cleansing and restoration to the community: the forgiveness of sins. Like sin, leprosy cuts one off from communion with God's people.

The Gospel of Mark narrates an extraordinary scene with the leper kneeling before Jesus, and saying, ***"If you wish, you can make me clean."*** With humility, trust and sincerity, these few words are, in fact, a powerful prayer. In a surprising move, Jesus stretches out to touch the leper, a gesture that would have rendered him ritually unclean. To avoid breaching the social and religious norms of his time, Jesus could have cured the leper from a distance, as he did the daughter of the temple official. But He chose to touch the man to set an example of compassion and love as He responded in these words: ***"I do so will it; be made clean"***.

The Gospel tells us that after this healing, the social and religious barriers against the unclean were broken. One could just imagine the joy that the former leper felt upon learning that he can now rejoin his family and friends; his joy knew no bounds. Predictably, he rushed around "proclaiming" and "making known the news" of his miraculous cure from leprosy, an event that could not easily be kept a secret. It was a reaction Jesus had anticipated when he gave the man a stern warning not to talk about it, but to go and show himself to the priest and offer the prescribed sacrifice as proof of the healing. After that, Jesus could no longer go about freely, but had to confine himself to isolated places. A reversal of roles had taken place. By touching the leper, Jesus delivered the man from isolation and loneliness, taking these upon himself as the Messiah. As the prophet Isaiah points out ***"It was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured... Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed,"*** (Is 53:4; Is 53. 3-12).

Mark makes a subtle catechetical point: All those cleansed in baptism must proclaim the Good News. Like the leper, we are to approach Jesus in humility and shame because we have

allowed sin to stain our baptismal garment. But shame should not prevent us from confessing and receiving healing. The leper showed Jesus his sores and begged to be healed. Likewise, we must approach Jesus in the sacrament of reconciliation by putting aside our pride, confessing our sins, and experiencing His healing.

Mark's gospel invites us to think about our own disposition of the heart. Jesus was faced with a choice, to heed the conventional practices of his time, or heal the leper. He chose to heal the leper and show God's compassion for the sick and the outcast, and that salvation was at hand. The scene provides us with a beautiful picture of God extending grace to each of us when we come to him, admitting our own inadequacies, acknowledging that he alone can make us clean, and throwing ourselves at his mercy. It is not enough that we have found God and become followers of Christ, we must – like the healed leper - spread the news to others that is one of great responsibilities the Lord lays upon us. As Christ had compassion on the leper, God challenges us to reach out with compassion to the lonely, the sick, the needy and the forgotten— perhaps with a phone call, an email, a visit, a helping hand.

Brothers and sisters let us turn this into an occasion and opportunity to approach Christ as the leper did. His sacrifice still holds. He is gracious and will forgive, restore, and heal our relationship to others and to Him. He is ready to cover with His blood all the hurtful and hateful things we have done, all the pain we have caused. God is willing to call us his own, to accept us completely. Are we willing to offer ourselves to Him?

We can find the same Jesus in the tabernacle, and in the sacrament of penance. The first step is up to us. And all heaven will rejoice. So humble yourself. Fall prostrate before Him. Be healed and cleansed! He is willing! So be cleansed!

Prayer:

Almighty Father, help us to follow your example by reaching out to those we have ignored, the outcasts in our daily lives. May we live worthy of your calling and without stain on our baptismal garments. We come before you knowing what is like to be cleansed by You. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do we go to confession with sincerity and trust in order to be cleansed? Do we have a real desire for purity of soul?
2. How often have I shared the good news of my healing and personal encounter with Christ, witnessing to Him through the living actions in my life?

“Ignorance of the Bible is ignorance of Christ. Read your Bible daily!”