

HOMILY 6TH SUN OT YRB 2018

I am always kind of horrified by the way people were treated when I read the first reading. If you had a sore on your skin that appears to be leprosy, you were to show yourself to a priest if he thinks it is leprosy, he would declare you unclean. He is separated from his friends and family, and in fact all of the community. The only people he or she can associate with are other lepers. If someone touched someone who was unclean, they would also be declared unclean. So no one is going to get close to you. If someone does get close at all to the leper they have to scream UNCLEAN, UNCLEAN to warn people. Now leprosy was a horrible disfiguring disease with no known cure at the time. I am not sure what was worse, the disease or the isolation from all of your support systems. I could probably deal with a terrible disease with the support of family and friends, but the isolation would make it even more overwhelming.

Knowing what the rules are, let's see what Jesus does in the Gospel reading. First of all, the leper should be nowhere near Jesus. That violates the rules. And then Jesus, being the rule breaker that he sometimes is reaches out and touches him. This is against the rules. This makes Jesus unclean! But Jesus does not care. Jesus heals him. Now if you think about it, you can kind of understand why people acted the way they did 2,000 years ago. They knew very little about medicine and the only way they knew to prevent the spread of the disease was through isolation. We would never treat people that way today, right? Well, probably not people with leprosy or Hansen's disease because we have a cure for that today. But I wonder if there are people that we treat like lepers out of fear or lack of knowledge. It is not so blatant. We may even be doing it without even realizing it.

I have had people tell me that they have put off seeing a friend or family member with a terminal disease because they do not know what to say. They are afraid they will say the wrong

thing. First of all, you do not need to say anything; you just need to be with them. And if it is someone you love, you will know what to say. They realize you cannot cure them, and that is not what they want from you. I have also had parents who have buried children tell me that they feel that some people with children avoid them. If it could happen to your child it could happen to mine to, and they do not want to face that. Now that is an irrational fear. You cannot catch it. But sometimes people are isolated when they really need their friend and family. How about children with special needs? They may make some different sounds or may behave a little differently, but they are our children and we need to love them and embrace them. There is nothing to be afraid of. What about the poor and the homeless. Sometimes we blame them for being poor and want to isolate them. And how about people with mental illness? There is still a stigma connected with mental illness, and sometimes people they need abandon them. And what about people with addictions? It is not a moral failing, it is a disease. They need our help and support. And how about the LGBT Community? So many people have felt different all of their lives, and have spent a lot of time trying to figure out where they fit. They have faced discrimination and hate crimes. They have been marginalized and isolated for years. We need to just meet them where they are and help them feel that they belong. I think we sometimes fear people who are different than we are, different races, different nationalities, different religions. I think we all have some of these types of biases, so I am suggesting that each of us spend some time praying about the people around us that we may be isolating out of fear.

When we identify them, I think we need to follow Jesus' example. We need to reach out and touch them rather than isolating them. I think when we get to know one another, most of the time the fear goes away. We always share much more in common than we are different. Everyone wants to belong. If we reach out to one another we can heal the hurt of isolation.