



Fisch-ing Lines

by Deacon Howard Fischer

The term “leprosy” as used in today’s Scripture readings should not be understood as only referring to what we now call *Hansen’s disease*. In biblical times “lepers” included anyone with a visible sore or skin condition. The result was that the afflicted ended up being feared, shunned, and excluded from the community. Perhaps we should look at our own community and identify who has been excluded and why – and what we can do to bring them back in as Jesus did. Modern day “lepers” may be:

- immigrants, refugees, Muslims
- senior citizens in nursing homes
- those with alcohol or drug addictions
- the unemployed and the homeless
- veterans afflicted with PTSD
- those suffering from mental illness
- people who feel scorned by the Church and church-goers

The list can go on and on. And sadly, we either help to isolate these folks or have grown to accept that they are “on the outside looking in.” Catholic author Alice Camille writes: *“We’d like to think we’re more civilized now, that we don’t insist that our modern lepers just cover themselves up and go away. Regretfully the homeless, the mentally ill, ...the undocumented and unemployed and desperate unseemly others that fall through the tears in our social fabric, are all still there tempting us to see them as unfit for our society and possibly for God’s. We still mix sin and suffering together in our minds and presume with Job’s ‘friends’ that he has somehow called down all this misery on himself. Jesus never approached an outcast with any kind of moral assessment. He saw the mark of suffering, and he willed it – not the person – to disappear.”*

Today’s Gospel passage carries two important messages. First, if you are the one feeling like an outcast, you need to know that Jesus reaches out with extraordinary love and compassion for those in crisis and pain. He seeks to heal you and bring you back to

full communion. The path that leads out of the isolation you feel begins with placing your trust and love in the person of Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice took on sin and suffering and transformed them into life and joy. Like the leper, we need to approach Jesus in faith and humility with the words “If you wish, you can make me clean.” Our encounter begins with the celebration of the Eucharist.

The second message of this Gospel is that you and I must let go of our excuses and boundaries, our criteria for judging others, for Jesus commissions us to work our own miracles of charity and mercy. How often do we, as individuals and as a society, find some rule or boundary (physical or psychological) to justify turning our backs on someone in need? Or worse, to justify causing them harm? Instead, as the Lord’s disciples we must extend his healing through works of compassion, forgiveness and justice. You and I can (and must) cure today’s lepers.

Alice Camille suggests that we use the same three-step process that Jesus uses to heal: *“We have to start with compassion, daring to connect on a fundamental human level with people whose situation or condition makes us afraid. That means dealing with our own insecurity and anxiety about need, failure, weakness, disability, and death...[Second, we] also have to be willing to touch lepers. We have to visit the sick and the homebound, stick with those in our communities who face misfortune, and remain faithful to members of our family who reveal to us what we don’t want to see. We have to be willing to look the homeless woman in the face, and to develop respectful relationships with people regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, orientation, religion, ability, or social class. Finally, we have to find the will to challenge any attitude, behavior, or structure that keeps people outside the camp of social concern. We have to will that no one be considered unclean or unworthy.”*

“If you wish, you can make me clean.” Let us hear and speak, “I do will it. Be made clean.” If you wish to contact me, please send an email to deaconhwhf99@yahoo.com.