

A Look Behind the Scriptures

Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time—Cycle B—February 12, 2012



Reading I: Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

The first reading presents a difficult and distressing situation and starts us longing for a remedy; it stirs us and makes us uncomfortable. The text may seem harsh to modern ears, but only if its true intent is missed. The leprosy cited here is both the same as and different from what we know as that disease today and included other skin maladies that could be temporary in nature. What's important to understand is that such diseases presented a double threat to the community. In addition to their contagion—a serious enough issue in a world lacking medical remedies—there was also a spiritual component: exposure to the disease rendered people spiritually unclean and disqualified them from participating in the community's worship. God is the speaker throughout the passage giving instructions meant for the safety and survival of the community, so they must be obeyed. Recent experiences with viruses like SARA and H1N1 help us better understand what might otherwise appear to be remarkable insensitivity or even cruelty.

Reading II: Corinthians 13:31-11:1

Paul's instructions are brief. He counsels the Corinthians to do everything for God; to give no offense to either Jew or Greek or the church; and he asks that all imitate him. Last week Paul told the Corinthians he became all things to all people, to save at least some. Now he says, "I try to please everyone in every way" as a reminder that he is willing to do any lawful thing to win their salvation. And in his willingness to put his 'own benefit' behind that of others, he is bold enough to ask them to imitate him. Paul is seldom shy about talking about himself and when such talk is for the benefit of others, he's downright fearless: imitate me, he says with great passion, for by doing so you imitate Christ

Gospel Mark 1:40-45

Commentators say we may have two stories dovetailed here: one which shows Jesus' pity toward the leper and another showing his anger toward the spirit of leprosy. The dismissal statement ("warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once") they claim, is directed at the spirit, not the leper. Is that's the case, it would explain why Jesus, after apparently sending him away, is suddenly addressing the leper again and instructing him "tell no one anything."

Whatever the case may be, the heart of this Gospel lies in the encounter between Jesus and the leper who pleads, "If you wish..." The man makes a claim on Jesus' compassion and Jesus reaches out and touches the man, thus rendering himself unclean and making himself ineligible to enter the synagogue. But Jesus has now bonded himself to this outcast and puts the leper's needs ahead of his own. Levitical law required a return visit to the priests to document ones' healing, and while Jesus wants the leper to comply he also ask the impossible of him: tell no one by whom or how he was healed. The leper disregards the order and instead boldly announces his good new to the entire village. Mark seems to be telling us that the presence of God in Jesus is so great that it cannot be hidden; it will be found out and must be made manifest—just as Jesus himself is found by the masses that come to him from "everywhere."

HOSTED BY OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY'S SPIRITUAL GROWTH COMMISSION
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