

Imagine what life must have been like for the man who found himself kneeling and begging before Jesus in today's Gospel. He was an outcast who was avoided by others at all costs. No one wanted to be around him for fear of ending up in the same predicament. According to the Law of Moses we heard in our first reading from Leviticus, he had to walk around with his clothes ripped, his head shaved, and yelling, "Unclean, unclean!" to alert others to his movements. He had to say goodbye to his home and loved ones because he couldn't live in the city. Instead, he was forced to live outside the city walls in what amounted to a garbage dump for people. And to top things off, he was separated from God because he was no longer allowed to worship with others. It must have been a terribly lonely existence.

But it hadn't always been that way for him though. He probably once led a normal life with a job and plenty of family and friends surrounding him. He worshipped God in the synagogue with everyone else. Then one day he got a blotch on his skin and received the dreaded diagnosis of leprosy; which meant that his entire world was turned upside down. He now had no hope for a cure. He had no hope of enjoying ordinary human companionship; no hope of receiving love; no hope of being accepted as a person. He was now labelled a leper. This label now defined his very being. It changed how others saw him and how he saw himself. It even changed how he viewed his relationship with God. In everyone's eyes, he was unworthy.

In many ways, we're a lot like the leper. We were once cleansed in Baptism. Our stain of original sin was washed away in the baptismal font. Our souls were as white as the baptismal garments we wore. But over time we sin - a little here and little there. We become more and more unclean until we suffer from a spiritual or sinful leprosy on the inside. We carry around wounds and scars. Maybe we suffer from the disease of anger, or of bitterness, or of stubbornness, or of greed. Maybe there is something in our lives that we are carrying around with

us that keeps us unclean and made to feel unworthy to be full and active members of our community. When we look in the mirror, we no longer see ourselves as God sees us – as beloved children of God. We only see our sins, our failures, and our shortcomings. We let these things define our very being. It changes how others see us and how we see ourselves. It even changes how we view our relationship with God. In everyone's eyes, we are unworthy.

The leper built up the courage to approach Jesus. In doing so, he broke every social taboo by reaching out to Jesus. He placed his entire trust in Jesus. For him, there was no doubt: this Jesus was the Messiah of hope, the Lord of Life. His request for healing was more than a cry for help – it was a profession of faith. He showed Jesus his wounds and begged for medicine. He placed himself at the will of God.

And thanks be to God, for His infinite compassion! Thanks be to God, for Christ his Son, who came and dwelt amongst us! There is nothing that we can do to separate ourselves from the love of God. There is no disease strong enough. There is no sin we can commit that is severe enough. God always loves us. Because of our inclination to sin and because of the many times we unfortunately give into that inclination, nothing but the mercy of God can save us from our own recklessness. If Jesus is unafraid to touch our deepest, darkest hurts and impurities, then let us not hide them. Just as the leper approached Jesus with faith and humility, let us also approach Jesus for our healing.

We need to pay attention to Jesus' words in the Gospel where he says, "Go, show yourself to the priest." Just like part of the leper's healing and re-entrance into God's community of believers, we too must present ourselves to the priest. It's what our religious tradition tells us to do. It is what Jesus tells us to do. What he told them back then is what Jesus tells us to do

today when we are tainted with the spiritual leprosy of sin. He tells us to go to the priest and confess. He tells us to take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Jesus does will and does want our salvation. His incarnation and death on the cross, prove that. The fact that He left the power to forgive sins to His Church is yet another proof of both his will and desire to help us. It is in this encounter with Jesus, through the priest, that we reveal our sins and show our spiritual leprosy ... and then receive from him God's healing power. Our leprosy of sin can be washed away and we can be restored to new and perfect spiritual health. How absurd would it be for us to commit sin and isolate ourselves, like an unclean leper, from God? How much more absurd would it be for us to remain in this unclean state when the cure for our disease is so readily available?

Jesus put heaven and a share in the life of God within our reach. All we have to do is reach out to Him. He has shown us how to attain them. He gave us His Church and the sacraments – all the necessary aids. All we have to do is make use of them. His mercy is available, if only we ask for it.

Jesus is the Messiah, the Holy One of God, the Savior, and the unblemished Lamb of God. He desires to heal us. He will touch what is thought to be untouchable. If we can find within ourselves the courage to bring our frailty, our brokenness, and our failure to the Lord, He will welcome us with the same compassion, the same understanding, and the same generous love with which He welcomed the leper. In Him, we will meet the God who calls to us and who offers us forgiveness, life, and hope. He will help us, and heal us, in the ways that He knows are best for us – and these may be different from the ways we are looking for. But we can be sure that our God is a God of endless compassion and love. He will not walk away from us or leave us to our own devices. There is no one too dirty that God can't make them worthy. All we have to do is

come to Him – with honesty, with humility, and with hope – just as the leper did in the Gospel.

The question for each us today is: “Am I ready to do this?”