

In today's Gospel reading we once again are given a special gift from Mark into the emotions of Jesus. We see the gentle teacher, we know of His deep love for all humankind and His compassion to heal those in desperate need, but Mark also gives us something more – a bonus emotion which does not fit with our views of Christ. So strange it is that the other Gospels do not mention it, only Mark does. This keeps with Mark's 'tell it like it is' approach, as he is not interested in what we want Jesus to be but rather he is interested in who Jesus really was and making sure to convey that to the world through his Gospel. This unexpected, out of place, emotion in verse 43 sounds so harsh, "Then warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once..." (Mark 1:43)

If we reflect further on Mark's recounting, I believe we can make sense of it.

Purity Laws & The Leaper

Our first reading took us all the way back to the Book of Leviticus and the many purity laws the priestly Tribe of Levi imposed upon themselves. Among those laws were those dealing with illness and disease, such as leprosy. These poor people were removed, possibly by force, from everything they knew – family, church, friends and society. They had to wear bells around their necks and proclaim, "UNCLEAN, UNCLEAN" loudly when any 'clean' person came near them. Think it harsh? Well without modern medicine to help form our morals these poor souls did pose a dire risk to the greater society. But woe to anyone who easily puts their betterment above the least of these! History is laden with societies (including our own) that marginalize, brutalize and even try to exterminate those they felt inferior to them. However, when Jesus encounters our leprous friend, covered in open sores, deformities, rotting smelling flesh, "Mark tells us Jesus was "moved" to pity. The Greek word Mark used to describe Jesus being "moved" is more a gut-wrenching empathy at the pain of this leper" (Carol & Dennis Keller, Volume2 Digest, Vol 47, Issue 1).

Reflections on Leapers

Sinful

Leapers, as were most people with an affliction, viewed as disease laden and receiving punishment from God for their sins. We may not have some horrible disease, but we too are laden with our own sins as all humankind is.

Ostracization

As so often is the case we ostracize what we don't know and what scares us. We can cover the stench of such actions with blankets and the scent of good intent but at its core it's wrong. We are all created by God in the image of God in not only God's image but likeness. As Biblical truth then, how can we ever cast out a fellow human who at their core is made of God, by God? Regardless of a border they crossed, a human law they may have violated, a faith they may

practice, an illness they may carry, the gender or gender identity they may be, or the type of person they give themselves fully to in the ultimate expression of being human and connecting to God; there is NO rationale to make one less than us.

We the Leapers

The leaper could be us. Our Leviticus leaper crosses a major boundary by coming to Jesus – a boundary he is not allowed to cross – or so says human-made law. We cross those same boundaries all the time in our lives friends, they are those times we fall short of Jesus's unending love and call to us. We are no worthier to approach Christ than that poor, flesh decaying, pustule covered man was. In some cases, even less than he – for he did not cloak his issues as we so often do to ourselves and those around us. But in either situation, there is Jesus full of love, void of judgement, accepting us as we are. Blisters, puss and all.

Jesus moves beyond humanity's laws

“What a scandal and a denial of the law [Jesus'] actions were! By this action, Jesus tells us to look into the pain of those around us – the sick, the outcasts, the immigrant, the homeless, the children abused, the outcasts of society, those on the margin because of language, disfigurement, those who are outside society, those who have no part in the economic life of our culture. By looking into the pain, we should be moved to empathy. We should be moved to touch and to bring healing to these people. This is a revelation of what God is. God's character is visible by [God's] continual compassion, mercy, and empathy for his creation. If we are to be whole (holy) we must imitate this characteristic of God” (Carol & Dennis Keller, Volume2 Digest, Vol 47, Issue 1).

The mood-swing

So, we now fully understand the amazing love of life Jesus has for us and how he did not even flinch at healing our leaper friend but what about this mood-swing I mentioned at the start of this reflection? Was his Grande Soy Mocha Latia Cap not to his liking that morning?

Remember how Mark tells us that Jesus was moved with pity? I think there is a connection between these two persons as both are cast out (if not in different ways) and both know, in the end, society will (and has) turned on them. I think Jesus truly connected with the leaper's humanity and felt the leaper's spark of God strongly. That spark planted there by God as a reflection of God. Jesus may have seen just a glimpse of himself at that moment.

Jesus also knows, despite his stern words, that the healed leaper will go and tell all. He could see it before the first boil vanished on the leaper's skin. He also knew this

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----Father Mike Cadotte----

would further confuse His message and His ministry. Jesus was, and is, trying to teach us a new way of love and peace to connect with our Creator. He did not want people coming with closed minds hyper focused on a 'healer in town' for the day. There were enough of those fakes already traveling around. This act of pure love and compassion will set Jesus back and make His life even more difficult but even worse, it will blind people to His true mission as they ignore the words in a vain effort to be healed. Jesus, the Gentle Shepherd, is watching his sheep falling away – and it breaks His heart.

We sin on...

Our Gospel story reveals what a truly remarkable person Jesus is. His kindness and caring were so prominent throughout his life! Even when we continue to violate the Word and ignore Christ's call He heals us. As His followers, we need to look inward and reflect the same presence He displayed into our broken world today.

AMEN