



February 12, 2012
Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand touched him, and said 'I do will it. Be made clean.'"
—Mark 1:41

Dear Friends;

When I was in the first and second grades at the Marian School (Miraculous Medal Parish) in Montebello we had a boy in my class who had the Spanish version of my name, Reynaldo. I do not know how it happened but somewhere in his life he had been seriously burned. His face and half his skull and an arm was covered in scar tissue, one of his ears was almost non-existent, and he was missing a couple of fingers on one of his hands. I remember some of my classmates were afraid of him.

I did not know what to make of him at first. So I asked my Dad about him. My father was a physician therefore all scientific questions went to him. I remember that my Dad explained that Reynaldo had had a terrible accident but that God loved him. My Dad also told me that I should try and be his friend and that I needed to set an example for the rest of the class. This would be what Jesus would want us to do.

I remember making the attempt to befriend Reynaldo. I felt awkward at first but he had a cheerful spirit despite his scars. And best of all he could be a bit mischievous. I recall laughing with him. Soon some of the other boys joined us.

I do not know what ever became of him. I changed classes and then we moved. I hope that in some small way some kids in that class were able to touch him and make him feel like he belonged.

In today's Gospel Jesus touches someone who was feared because of the way he looked and from what he suffered. The disease that afflicted him made him an outcast like a religious version of cooties. No one would interact with him—except Jesus. And that touch healed. That touch made the man part of the community. That touch brought him in contact with the holiness of God.

Jesus does not abide by arbitrary rules of purity and holiness that only recognizes those identified as whole, beautiful, powerful, or perfect. For Jesus the only holiness is that which flows from a response to God's love and forgiveness. Those who are perfect cannot know this healing. Only those who are willing to admit their spiritual disfigurement and vulnerability can become changed by love and grace. Once changed by Jesus they can go and touch others in his name.

I once read that physicians who touch their patients were more effective than those who did not. Jesus the divine physician touches and heals us. He invites us to do the same.

So who are the lepers in my life? We all have them, people we avoid out of fear, disgust, anger, resentment, dislike, or strong disagreement. Perhaps I am my own leper, unable to claim my own innate God-given dignity, beauty and gifts. Perhaps I can recognize and touch in some way the leper in my life and turn the bitter into sweet.

Peace,

Fr Ron