

**SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**“The Scourge of Leprosy”**

**Fr. Max Oliva, S.J.**  
**February 14, 2021**

Today’s readings are not only about what happened in Moses’ and Jesus time but also in ours. It doesn’t take much imagination to see how the effects of leprosy then and the effects of Covid-19 on community living are related. Then, if you were a leper you had to distance yourself from the town you were from and live outside it. Now, if you have Covid-19 you have to be in quarantine for two weeks or, if it is really serious, in the hospital – where everyone near you has to suit up in such a way that none of their skin is showing lest they get the virus too.

Let’s take a look at what leprosy is in the Bible. It did not always mean just what is known now as Hansen’s Disease but also included other skin problems such as fungal infections, eczema, or psoriasis. The priest decided whether a skin eruption was leprosy. If the disease progressed, the person was declared ritually “unclean.” Since ritual impurity jeopardized the pure life and worship of the community, the lepers were separated from the community. For the leper this meant they had no normal way of making a living and human companionship was impeded – except with their fellow lepers.

**(Living With Christ)**

What is remarkable, then, is Jesus reaction to a leper. First, Jesus allowed the leper to approach him; he knelt down in front of Jesus and begged to be healed. Moved with pity for the leper, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and healed him. Not only was the man physically healed but he could now return to his town and his family. He could find work. An amazing gift with all kinds of ramifications.

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There is a wonderful story about St. Francis of Assisi who one day met a leper on the road below his town. In the past, Francis like everyone else avoided any kind of contact with lepers. Inspired by the Holy Spirit he not only touched the leper he threw his arms around the leper and kissed his cheek!

**HYMN**

*Banned and banished by his neighbors,  
Full of sores, accused of sin,  
Scorned and scarred, a leper was calling,  
Warning all, “Unclean! Unclean!”*

*Jesus met the leper with compassion,  
Heard the leper’s cry, “Have mercy, Lord!”  
Cleansed the leper’s flesh and turned the leper homeward  
With his saving, healing Word.*

*Still, O Christ, we bring before you  
Ills of body, mind, and soul.  
Speak again your Word of healing;  
Cleanse, renew and make us whole!*

*Then, redeemed, restored, forgiven,  
Lord, this other gift impart:  
For the mercy you have shown us,  
Grant us each a grateful heart.”*  
**(Magnificat)**

**AMEN.**

**Fr. Max Oliva, S.J.**