

Cycle B 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sunday February 11th, 2018

St. Damien DeVeuster of Molokai is known as the leper priest. A religious of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, he went to Hawaii in 1864 to serve as a missionary. In 1873 he began his greatest missionary work on the Island of Molokai which was established as a leper colony. Upon his arrival he found immorality, anarchy, and no medical care. He brought the people together building houses and schools, and the church that was built is still standing today. After 16 years of missionary zeal with his community of people, he became like them and developed leprosy; which eventually lead to his death. He was canonized by Pope Benedict in 2009 and held up as model of self-sacrifice.

Leprosy is a disease that affects the respiratory tract and skin lesions are an external sign of the disease. The disease is not as contagious as once thought. Due to the past belief of being highly contagious the Levitical Law of the Old Testament gave the authority to the Levitical Priest to judge if someone was unclean with leprosy. Those that were found unclean were placed outside the community and could have no contact with the rest of the community. This was likely how they would spend the rest of their lives living in isolation of family and friends.

Today we hear about a man with leprosy who encountered Jesus. The man kneeled before Jesus and begged Him saying, **“If you wish you can make me clean.”** Jesus was moved with pity and touched him saying, **“I do will it be made clean.”** Because of the power of our Lord the leprosy left him immediately. Jesus instructed the man, **“See that you tell no one anything, but go show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed. That will be proof for them.”** Of course we know the man did not follow Jesus instructions. He was so excited to be healed that he went and told people what happened. And, the man was now able to live once more **in the community** rather than apart from the community as we heard was the law coming from the Book of Leviticus. We are meant to be in communion with others. Jesus obviously did not want the publicity. Likely, because Jesus was concerned that people would get caught up in the healing event, but miss the super natural reality of the power of God at work in the midst of the people.

This passage of the Gospel is still relevant today. We cannot lose sight of the super natural reality that the Lord continues to be active in the world today. Obviously we know that physical leprosy does exist for a number of people in the world. We also know that we are more than just a body. We are body and soul. What is the state of our souls? Many of us are afflicted with a spiritual leprosy of the soul.

With Lent approaching we are once more given the opportunity to take a good look at the state of our soul. Are we growing in the seven cardinal virtues of humility, liberality, meekness, kindness, temperance, chastity and diligence? Or are we tied down with the seven deadly sins of pride, greed, anger, envy, gluttony, lust and sloth? Maybe the struggle is sporadic Sunday worship, or chronic anger, or sexual impurity, or contraception. Perhaps there is an irregular marriage situation that needs the healing love of the Church? Sometimes our own leprosy of the soul separates us from those we love, and who love us. The Good News is that just as Jesus heals physical leprosy, He also heals leprosy of the soul. He does this through His Church which He has given the authority to forgive sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus is less concerned with what we have done, and is most concerned about where we are going. The Code of Canon Law for the Church carries this concern with the words, **“The supreme law of the Church is the salvation of souls.”**

As we approach this Season of Lent may we each experience healing of the leprosy that afflicts our soul, so that we can be closer to our families and our worshipping community.