

## **I Do Choose. Be Made Clean!**

**Lev. 13: 1-2, 45-46; 1 Cor. 10: 31-11:1; Mk. 1: 40-45**

During this time of pandemic, there has been so much suffering. Of course, we have heard of, or personally felt, the ravages of COVID-19. But we have also heard of the suffering caused by isolation and loneliness resulting from the necessary response to the pandemic.

The health experts have told us that we need to isolate ourselves from others to reduce the spread of the virus. This has meant staying away from family and friends, even during holidays and other special days. Also, students have been staying at home from school for long periods of time with their only contacts with teachers and schoolmates coming via on-line classes. Experts have said that isolation has caused depression and other mental health issues, or worsened those that were already existing.

If the effects of isolation are so pronounced after one year of restrictions, think of the impacts of many years of isolation. In the First Reading for this Sunday, we learn of the rules that the Israelites had pertaining to those who contracted the 'dreaded skin disease', leprosy. Because of the fear of contagion associated with leprosy, the leper was shunned by the rest of society. He had to live outside the city, away from everyone else. Whenever he went out, he had to wear ragged clothing and be dishevelled. He had to warn others to stay away by calling out: 'Unclean, unclean!' And he had to wear a mask. The isolation and loneliness of the leper added greatly to the effects of the disease itself.

In the Gospel, we read about a leper who, instead of warning Jesus to stay away, approached Him humbly but confident in the knowledge that Jesus could heal him 'if He chose'. In His infinite compassion, Jesus responded: 'I do choose. Be made clean!' But He went even further by touching the leper. Jesus showed that He was not bound by rules. He showed that he was prepared to do anything to demonstrate God's compassion and love to everyone, even those excluded by society.

We may not feel that we have been shunned by society but we may be so bound up by our sins or by the depths of our need for physical or spiritual healing that we feel isolated from everyone else. It may seem that no one cares. No one seems to understand. No one seems to be able to help. But Jesus shows that, through His limitless compassion and love, He does choose to heal us. Whether we approach Him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation or in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, His healing is always available. The season of Lent is almost upon us. Let us use that time to avail ourselves of the healing and peace that God wants for us.

St. Paschasius Radbertus, a French monk and theologian in the eighth century, commented on the Gospel saying: 'If we approach the Lord with our petitions with faith, perseverance, patient endurance of delay, humility, confidence, reverence, and discernment, we will hear the Lord say: 'I do choose.' Jesus wants to draw us out of the darkness of our isolation into the light of his love. Will we let Him?