

With all the advancements in medical science

There remain some things that scare us

Leprosy probably tops the list

Today, we know a lot about it

We know that 95% of the population is naturally immune

We know that it can be controlled

We know that the spread can be limited

Modern hygienics help keep it at bay

But there is no cure

Here in the West, we no longer isolate lepers

We do not have leper colonies

But in the East they still do

When I was in India 7 years ago

We saw leper colonies

They were still treated as outcasts

Among the lowest of all on the caste system

They still think they are being punished by the gods

Because this is one thing that can take someone from a higher rung

And make anyone untouchable

With all the modern science

With the availability of modern medicine

There is still something about leprosy

If we are honest with ourselves

Even here in the United States

If someone with Hansen's disease moved into the neighborhood

Would it make us uncomfortable?

At least at first and on the surface?

So think what it was like in Christ's time

And before that, how unsettling this disease was

When they received the rules of life

How to live lives as God's chosen people

This is what Leviticus is

A book with all the laws and prescriptions from God

On how to live a holy life

If someone was thought to have leprosy

They were removed from their family

From their community

Forced to live separate from any human contact

Save another leper

For them, it wasn't just the full scale leprosy

It was any skin affliction, anything out of the ordinary

To be on the safe side, they were cast out

And to be readmitted, they did not see a medical person

They were sent to the Levitical priest

Or rather, the priest went to them

If the affliction was cleared up

They would perform a ritual cleansing

And allow them back into the community, into the Temple

If not, they remained as outcasts

So this sets the stage for our Gospel

This man comes to Christ

Breaking all the societal norms

Rather than calling out '*unclean, unclean*'

He comes right up to Christ

He kneels at Jesus' feet

And he begs him

If you will, you can make me clean

Moved with pity

Reading this in Greek, we see Jesus' heart is moved

But not only his heart, but a sacrificial heart

The Greek word for heart is '*kardia*'

But the word in the Gospel is '*splagchna*'

A term used to refer to the organs taken in a blood sacrifice

The heart was thought to be the seat of all feelings

Including mercy and compassion

There can be no deeper or stronger feeling

This is Jesus' concern for outcasts

And now Jesus ignores all social norms

He reaches out and touches him

I do will it, be made clean

How long since this man had experienced a simple human touch?

Surrounded by people

Yet totally alone

Untouched and unwanted

The treatment he received was far worse than the disease

Let's touch on a couple lessons here

First is the un-Catholic notion that we deserve to suffer

Yes, there is spiritual value in suffering

But that doesn't mean we should go looking for it

Suffer it in silence

Not seeking to be made clean

The leper comes to Christ

He seeks him out

Lord, if you will it, you can make me clean

Jesus doesn't send him away

Forget you!

You are suffering because the Father has decreed it to be!

Isn't that what keeps us away at times?

How many people do we know who say something similar

I can never go into a church

It has been so long

The roof might cave in

What they are really saying is:

I can't go near Christ

He will knock down the church

He will hurt me worse than I am already hurting

And so they isolate themselves from the cure

It would be like having a broken ankle

And deciding I will let it heal on its own

I don't need a doctor

I don't need surgery

God gave me this broken ankle

If it is His will, He will heal it

If it is crazy in our bodily ailments and injuries

It is even more so in our spiritual lives

If we are broken, we need the spiritual doctor
We need Christ, whose words are sharper than a double edged sword
His word can do surgery on our souls
He can cut out the sin, the pride, the envy, the slothfulness
His sacraments are the antibiotics of the soul
Baptism, the Eucharist, confession, confirmation, marriage
Holy Orders and anointing
These bring healing and health
It is through the sacraments that Christ reaches out to us
And his words are the words he spoke to the leper
I do will it; be made clean
So it is ok to seek relief
This healing can bring another kind of suffering
But this will be a suffering that is for the glory of God
The leper is told by Christ
Go to the priests
Offer what they prescribe
And tell no one anything
This was his penance in a way
It was for his own good
And for the good of others

It was so Jesus could continue doing his ministry

He could continue doing his work openly

He did not want to be seen as a miracle worker

That is what Herod desired to see

Christ desired to become known on his timetable

To be known for who he truly is

The Son of God

But now, the leper is cured

He makes his report

And the healer becomes the leper

Christ can no longer go about openly

He is the one who must remain outside of the towns in the wilderness

So we do not need to seek after suffering

It will find us on its own

And when it does

It is ok to seek relief

To seek forgiveness

And at the same time

To try to bear with it as best we can

And always following the example of St. Paul

Do everything for the glory of God