

## GOSPEL

MARK 1:40-45

A leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his knees: 'If you want to' he said 'you can cure me.' Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. 'Of course I want to!' he said. 'Be cured!' And the leprosy left him at once and he was cured. Jesus immediately sent him away and sternly ordered him, 'Mind you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest, and make the offering for your healing prescribed by Moses as evidence of your recovery.' The man went away, but then started talking about it freely and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived. Even so, people from all around would come to him.

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

On these Sundays, the Gospel according to Mark presents to us Jesus who heals sick people of every kind. Today's Gospel passage presents to us the healing of a man afflicted with leprosy, a disease that in the Old Testament was considered a grave impurity and required the leper to be separated from the community: they lived in isolation. His condition was truly pitiful, because the mind-set of the time made him feel unclean even before God, and not only before mankind. Even before God. Therefore the leper of the Gospel beseeches Jesus with these words: "If you will, you can make me clean".

Upon hearing this, Jesus feels pity. It is very important to pay attention to this inner resonance of Jesus, as we did at length during the Jubilee of Mercy. We cannot understand the works of Christ, we cannot understand Christ himself, if we do not enter his compassionate and merciful heart. And this is what spurs him to stretch out his hand to that man afflicted with leprosy, to touch him and say to him: "I will; be clean". The most shocking fact is that Jesus touches the leper, because that was absolutely prohibited by Mosaic law. Touching

a leper meant being infected even inside, in the spirit, that is, becoming unclean. But in this case the influence flows not from the leper to Jesus so as to transfer the contagion, but actually from Jesus to the leper so as to grant him purification. In this healing, apart from Jesus' compassion and mercy, we admire his audacity. He is concerned neither about the contagion nor about the rules, but is moved only by the will to free that man from the curse that burdens him.

Brothers and sisters, no disease is a cause of impurity: disease certainly involves the whole person, but in no way does it impair or impede his or her relationship with God. On the contrary, a sick person can be even more united with God. Instead, sin: that yes, is what makes us unclean! Selfishness, arrogance, entering the world of corruption: these are diseases of the heart from which we need to be purified by turning to Jesus like the leper: "If you will, you can make me clean!".

Let's observe a moment of silence, and each of us think about our own heart, look within ourselves, and see our own impurities, our own sins. And may each of us, in silence, but with the voice of our heart, say to Jesus: "If you will, you can make me clean". Let us all do so in silence. "If you will, you can make me clean". "If you will, you can make me clean".

And each time we approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation with a contrite heart, the Lord also repeats to us: "I will; be clean!". How much joy there is in this! In this way the leprosy of sin is overcome; we return to joyfully experience our filial relationship with God and we are fully readmitted into the community.

Through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, our Immaculate Mother, let us ask the Lord, who brought wellbeing to the sick, to heal even our inner wounds with his infinite mercy, and thus give us back hope and peace of heart.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Have you ever felt ashamed or embarrassed before God, not to mention other people? Like the leper in the story, how did you overcome that shame in order to find healing and hope?
- In what ways have you felt Jesus' compassion and words to you 'Of course I want to, be cured'? You may have experienced this on an emotional, spiritual or even physical level.
- Jesus breaks through taboos and barriers in order to engage the leper. How does this challenge you when faced with situations that call for a compassionate response?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.