

St. Mark in his Gospel realizes the importance of Jesus' healing ministry, especially the ministry of exorcism. The first miracle in Mark is an exorcism. In presenting such exorcisms and other healings over and over again, Mark is highlighting the fact that Jesus' ministry (and our own as well) involves a battle between good and evil; light and darkness.

This same theme is present in the Gospel passage that we have today from the end of the first chapter of the Gospel, the healing of the leper. As a background it's important to understand what occurred to someone who contracted some type of skin disease. We are not speaking here solely of what we've come to call *Hanson's disease*. Leprosy for the time was any type of blotch or sore on the skin. Some were contagious others were not, but all were treated equally – the person was separated from family and community and cut off from basic human contact. It was a terrible suffering psychologically and socially. This is why we are presented with the passage from Leviticus as our first reading.

Both the leper's faith and Jesus' response are extraordinary when you consider the social restrictions of the time. The leper was forbidden to approach a *clean* person, and no *clean* person would have touched someone who was *unclean*. Nonetheless, the leper's desire and his faith lead him to beseech Jesus for help. Mark presents the event clearly and indicates that Jesus was "moved with pity." This is one among many texts that have a variant; that is, another possible translation. Some manuscripts say that Jesus became angry – not at the leper but at the leper's situation. In either case, Jesus is clear in His response, "I do will it. Be made clean."

There is another aspect of leprosy as presented in the Scriptures that cannot be overlooked. Leprosy and any type of sickness or impurity were also seen as connected with sin. Hence, the lepers were considered impure in both body and soul. It is clear and certain that Jesus had compassion and pity for those who were sick in the body, but far greater was His concern for those who were sick in the soul. The leprosy that eats away at the body is a passing thing. With death it ends. The leprosy that eats away at the soul is far worse for it leads to eternal destruction.

St. Paul points out that all we do should be done for the glory of God. Each of us then should examine our hearts and ask ourselves if we are listening to that call. Are we glorifying God in our words, in our actions, in our attitudes? Are we glorifying God in our work, in our relationships, in the way we practice our faith. Are we glorifying God in the way we show concern for the least of our brothers and sisters? All of these are questions that we need to answer. For if we are not glorifying God in this way, it may be that we are spiritually sick. It may be that slowly but surely unrecognized sin is eating away at our soul, denying us peace, and separating us from our loving God.

If so, we thankfully, have the beautiful example of the leper who approached Jesus with faith, with confidence, without fear and with conviction. We too should approach Jesus in the same way. Jesus gave us the gift of confession because He knows how broken we are at times. He knows that we are afflicted in so many ways. And He wants us to receive His gift of healing. You would be amazed at the miracles that I have seen through this sacrament. People who have been away from the sacrament for 10, 20, 30 or more years who come with all of their burdens, their guilt, and their trepidation; yet, when they give it all to Jesus in the sacrament, their lives are transformed. They experience the peace that only Christ can give.