

Homily for the 6th Sunday in OT B (Feb 11-12, 2012)

Sacred Heart

Salisbury, NC

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In the days when the Lord Jesus walked the earth, a person who suffered from leprosy, really any number of skin diseases, was an outcast from society. The leper had no place in the community. The leper was separated from worship until they had been declared clean of their disease by a temple priest. The leper was not welcome in public discourse, and had to announce themselves as “unclean, unclean” and dwell apart from society. The leper was unwelcome and unwanted in society.

That is why it is so very surprising that the leper approaches the Lord Jesus. The leper comes before the Lord and kneels in worship. In the Gospel according to Mark that we are reading in this liturgical year, this leper is the first person to worship Jesus. One who knows his own need for healing and approaches in humility is the first to offer worship to the incarnate Son of God. From his humility and his sickness, the leper seeks healing from the Lord in whom he believes the divine power of healing is both resident and active. The Lord Jesus heals him, and sends

him to the temple priest that he might be declared clean and readmitted to society.

For us as individuals, the comparison is quite clear. The divine law, written on the heart of the human person in creation, revealed in veils and shadows in the Old Testament and definitively revealed in the person, words and work of Jesus Christ convinces us of our need for healing. The divine law, the precious gift of the Father's heart, invites us to a participation in the relationship of perfect love that is the Blessed Trinity. And when we fail to love, we are in need of healing. Christ Jesus our Savior has continued his ministry of healing and reconciliation thorough his priests. Jesus has placed this great treasure in unworthy and fragile earthen vessels so that these earthen vessels might give the treasures of heaven to sick ones of earth. We each need healing. We each need reconciliation. So it is that we come before the Lord knowing our own need for healing and in humility we offer our worship to the One, the Only One who can heal and save us.

For us as a body, the assembly of the baptized set apart to be the continuing presence of the Lord Jesus in the world, the comparison is a

little more difficult. The Second Vatican Council speaks of the Church as being in the world in the nature of a Sacrament. This means that the Church is visible, instituted by Christ and by her very being and by her activity makes available life in communion with God, that is, confers grace. She offers to the world the love of God and the teaching of Jesus and lays before the world the full moral implications of living in love. Again and again in every generation the Church proclaims the dignity of the human person and the nature of conscience, and announces nearly alone for the past eighty years, that human persons are mysteries to be revered rather than objects to be used.

Now, rather than welcoming such a presence, rather than receiving with joy the message and mission of the prince of peace and Love incarnate, the government of this country, particularly the Department of Health and Human Services, has chosen to view the Church, that is us, in another way. To them, we are not a Sacrament. To them, we are not a leaven making society better. To them, the Church is a leper. We are not, so they say, to have a place in public discourse. We are asked to place our deeply held convictions on the altar of sacrifice to idols who

have no power to heal and no power to save. It not for what we believe, but for our insistence that what we believe influences how we live, that makes us unwelcome and unwanted. As citizens and people of good will, as members of the Body of Christ called to bring Christ to the world in season and out of season, we have much work to do.

But of course, my brothers and sister, the hard truth, perhaps the hardest truth, is that if we want, as we must want, to be agents of transformation in the world out there, then we must first recognize our own need for healing and transformation in here.

Today we come to the Eucharist, in need of healing and in need of strength for the battles that lies ahead. May the Lord Jesus whom we love and whom we serve strengthen and heal us that we might then heal and strengthen our nation and our world. Amen.