

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2024 B

“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.” If we added up the Masses, Rosaries, and other prayers of everyone here, I wonder how many times we have said those words of Jesus, teaching us to say to His Father: thy will be done. They trip off the tongue easily. But to mean them, sincerely and consistently, is the work of a lifetime. They are words that surrender control to Another, and that always comes hard to our human uncertainty and the sufferings that test our faith in God and in the goodness of which humans are still capable by the Lord’s healing grace.

Think, then, of the humility, courage, and trust of the words of this man with leprosy: ***“If you wish, you can make me clean.”*** No demands, no promises, no bargains with Jesus; just a humble request. He had been rejected by the people around him so often in his illness that perhaps he was also ready for the answer to be “No, go away, ask me another time.”

In the Jewish law, a range of skin diseases and infections were lumped together under the single name of leprosy ... including what we today call Hansen’s disease but also less serious afflictions as well. We don’t know how advanced this man’s condition was, or how long he had suffered. But we do know that leprosy was considered highly contagious, so that as a public health matter, those with leprosy were segregated from the rest of the population. They were outcasts, exiles ... not only suffering physically but isolated from the people, places, and routines important to them. ***We all experienced a taste of that during COVID’s rearrangement of life, and that can help us understand both the suffering and the faith of this man, seeking to be made whole once again.*** Those with leprosy were in a way highly symbolic for Israel, whose history was repeatedly marked by times of exile from their homeland. As God had intervened to lead them back home from Egypt through Moses, so the people’s hope remained that there would be a Messiah sent to lead a new Exodus to bring them home and set them free.

Looking past the illness to see a child of God, Jesus touches this man, likely the first human touch he had experienced in a long time. But his healing was not just a return to physical health; it was simultaneously a return to freedom, to his family, to his community. It must have felt something like the end of an exile, coming back from the dead, beginning a whole new life.

Life in a fallen world often wounds and separates us. We too need healing, renewal, a welcome back into Communion with God and peace with one another. As we enter a Lent of Unity this week, we recognize that while our struggles may differ, what most unites us is that we each need redemption from the same source, the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus. *In these coming days, think about what you struggle to surrender, what keeps you in some kind of exile from freedom, hope, reconciliation with someone.*

With humble trust, we can say those wise words: “If you wish, you can heal me;” and then we listen for Jesus to say: “Yes, I do will it ... be healed, start anew, come home.” That healing cannot *erase* whatever is in our past, and it will not suddenly remove the challenges we face; but it can end an exile, and help us know a feeling like coming back from the dead, and beginning a new life.