

## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2021 B

Fr. Klaes Tande was a seminary classmate from Norway. With his very dry sense of humor, he used to say that if he ever became Pope, the Latin motto on his coat of arms would come from the Lord's Prayer. But instead of "Fiat voluntas TUA" – "may THY will be done" – his would read "Fiat voluntas mea" – "May MY will be done." He meant it as a joke, of course; but it captures well the humility, courage, and trust of the words of this man with leprosy: ***"If you wish, you can make me clean."*** Just before Communion at every Mass, we repeat the centurion's words from another healing miracle of Jesus – words that express that same attitude of humble trust: ***"Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof; but only say the word, and my soul shall be healed."***

At Jesus' time, 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. ***That sounds all too familiar almost a year into 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 and set them free once again.

Looking past the illness to see a child of God, Jesus touches this man ... perhaps the first 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.

Even before COVID, 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. *We can so easily isolate people like the lepers in Scripture: casting them aside, exiling them from our favor, refusing a basic human gesture of respect and care. Though we might today call it “cancel culture” it is far from new. Resentments take root, walls grow higher, and our joy in others, and in ourselves, is poisoned. In contrast to a world that often conditions us to demand, Jesus teaches us to receive as He gives Himself to us in the Eucharist, knowing when we say Thy will be done, we find a peace the world cannot give.*

As we enter Lent this week, we have a new opportunity to bring our own sorrows, wounds, and needs to Him. With humble trust, we can say those wise words: “If you wish, you can heal me;” and then listen for Jesus to say: “Yes, I do will it ... come home, be healed, be redeemed.” That healing cannot erase whatever is in the 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.