

## **Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jun 28th 2024**

### **Christian closeness**

Leprosy was regarded as a life sentence, and healing a leper was as challenging as resurrecting the dead – a near impossibility. When Jesus came down from the mountain, a great crowd followed him. However, those with illnesses could not follow him because they were ‘unclean’, and their law forbade them from public appearances.

In today's scripture, the individual affected by leprosy faced a challenging choice when contemplating approaching Jesus, since being recognized could result in stoning. Jesus also grappled with a difficult decision. Even the act of touching a leper would have rendered him unclean in the eyes of his adversaries, potentially leading to condemnation. Nevertheless, Jesus did not hesitate to draw near. He boldly reached out his hand and healed him.

Many people continue to keep themselves at a distance from Jesus because their lack of courage displayed by the leper. However, Jesus extends his hand to all, without fear of becoming impure himself.

A beautiful reflection on this Gospel passage was given by Pope Francis in 2015. He said, “Closeness is such an important word: you can’t build a community without closeness; you can’t make peace without closeness; you can’t do good without drawing near. Jesus could have said to him: “Be healed!” But instead, He drew close and touched him. What’s more: at the moment Jesus touched the unclean man, he himself became unclean. And this is the mystery of Jesus: He takes upon himself our unclean-ness, our impurities”.

St Paul describes this well when he writes, “Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself”. Let us pray that we may not be afraid to draw close to the needy, who are visible or to those who have hidden wounds. This is the grace of drawing near.

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