

## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 02/14/21

“A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him...If you wish you can make me clean. Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, I do will it. Be made clean. The leprosy left him immediately...”

Jesus then warned him to tell no one but as we heard the man went away and began to publicize the whole matter.

He didn't listen very well but then again consider the punishment that went with leprosy.

“The one who bears the sore of leprosy...shall cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean!’ As long as the sore is on him he shall declare himself unclean since he is in fact unclean. He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp.”

A leper was completely banned from normal human affairs. Nobody would even dare touch the leper lest they too became unclean. A leper actually had to carry a bell around and cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean!’, when he entered an area.

He was completely ostracized not only for the leprosy but also because of his sins. It was ultimately believed that it was sin that brought this terrible disease upon him.

Well now we know that just isn't true. Imagine the joy that this man would have experienced when he was touched by Jesus and cured of this horribly anti-social disease.

No wonder he failed to obey the Lord and keep his mouth shut. I doubt I would have been able to be silent either. Most people would almost certainly have behaved the same.

But you know what is really sad? As bad as any physical illness is, even the most deadly, sin is the only thing that can kill the soul and exile us from God for all eternity and very few people seem to be too worried about it.

It would do all of us well to carry a bell in our hearts reminding us that compared to God we are all unclean.

We know from scripture than nothing impure will enter the kingdom of heaven and that this life is the means to purify us.

We also know that the process of purification is likened to the purification of a lump of gold – seven times refined.

When gold is first mined it's intermixed with lots of impurities so it is put to the fire over-and-over again in order to remove that which is not gold.

So it is for us. We all have our own sins and attachments that need to be refined out of us.

Intentional prayer, fasting and penance are God's chosen tools to purify us. But also the natural struggles and sorrows of this life are meant bring about a purification of our lives as well but they must be united to the passion of Jesus.

On Wednesday we will begin our annual Lenten observance.

It would do all us well to be more intentional this Lent and really focus on the areas in our lives where we really do need to be purified.

I would suggest that during these forty days we increase our time of prayer and focus on traditional forms of penance such as fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays and above all frequent confession.

These practices have a way of opening our eyes to any imperfections in us that need to be removed so that we can experience the joy of real healing – the forgiveness of our sins.

And let's not be afraid to carry around that spiritual bell in our hearts as a reminder that compared to God we are all unclean.

Jesus is just waiting to stretch out his hand to touch us especially in confession and make us perfectly clean so that one day we will be ready for entry into his kingdom.