



Preaching Resource for World Marriage Sunday

February 11, 2024

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Leviticus 13: 1-2, 44-46

Responsorial Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 11

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

Mark: 1: 40-45

In the Gospel of Mark, the encounter between Jesus and a man with leprosy reminds us of love's healing power. It is easy to overlook this beautiful aspect of love. Love heals, cures, mends, and restores what has been broken or wounded. Most importantly, through Jesus' love, we are saved!

When Jesus began his public ministry, the visible sign that Jesus was the Messiah was His healing miracles. He restored sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and cured the sick. He freed individuals from spiritual torments and raised the dead. Most importantly, he reconciled sinners through His understanding and forgiveness. His love restored individuals to wholeness through his comforting words and touch.

In the gospel, we find Jesus encountering a poor leper who begs with deep faith for Jesus to heal him. *"If you wish, you can make me clean."* The response of Jesus, moved by the leper's plea, was, *"I do will it. Be made clean."* Jesus touched him, and the man was instantly healed.

It might seem strange that despite Jesus' warning, *"See that you tell no one anything,"* the former leper unabashedly began to witness publicly how Jesus had cured him. Why did he do this? The answer is simple. The man could not contain his tremendous feelings of joy. He was healed. He was not going to die.

In contrast to the gospel, in the first reading from Leviticus, Moses directs what is to be done if a person contracts the debilitating disease of leprosy. If diagnosed with the disease, immediately, the leper was to separate themselves from the rest of the community, *"He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp"* to minimize the risk of spreading the disease to others. The leper was mandated to warn people to stay away if they came too close, *"he shall cry out, 'Unclean, unclean!'"*



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The two readings offer a stark contrast between the hopelessness of the plight of anyone with leprosy in the Old Testament and the hope given to the leper through his encounter with Christ.

As the example of the healed leper shows, something profound and life-changing happens when a person experiences the healing love of Jesus Christ. The person feels a newness, a wholeness, a sense of peace. The generosity of Christ's love wells up inside till the heart overflows with thankfulness. As Pope Francis says, "The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus."¹ After people have encountered Jesus, they want to share the joy from the love they have received—their life changes.

As testimony to the world that Jesus Christ is the love of God made visible, that his saving love is real, the witness of how we live is the most potent and concrete proof. The words attributed to St. Francis of Assisi ring true, "Proclaim the gospel. If necessary, use words."

People need to both feel and see in us the love of Christ in our acts of forgiveness, patience, understanding, long-suffering, generosity, and kindness.

As the spiritual writer Hans von Balthasar entitled one of his books, "Love Alone is Credible,"² love must be perceived, shown, and lived. When love is shown beyond words, it is compelling. All else is just pious talk.

We are "Summoned by Love" as disciples of Jesus to love day in and day out.³ Paraphrasing St. Paul's encouragement in his Letter to the Corinthians to "[B]e imitators of me, as I am of Christ," for the Christian, to live is to love, and to love is to die, over and over again, in imitation of Christ. In the end, unto eternity, only love matters.

St. John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio - On the Family*, touched on the Divine summons to love when he said:

God created man in his image and likeness: calling him to existence through love; he called him at the same time for love. ... Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.⁴

In his apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici – On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*, St. John Paul II explained that every Christian is to bring the hope of Christ's healing love to the world.

The lay faithful have an essential and irreplaceable role in this announcement and in this testimony: through them the Church of Christ is made present in the various sectors of the world, as a sign and source of hope and love.⁵

¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*. Vatican City: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013, p.1.

² Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004.

³ Carlo Carretto, *Summoned by Love*. New York: Orbis Books, 1978.

⁴ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*. Vatican City: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981, no. 11.

⁵ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*. Vatican City: Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988, no. 7.



In his encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est - God is Love*, Pope Benedict XVI began his reflection with these simple words:

God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (1 Jn 4:16). These words from the First Letter of John express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith...⁶

The challenge for every Christian is to know what to do when they find themselves in situations without love.

The great Spanish mystic and doctor of the Church, St. John of the Cross, offers some sage advice, “Where there is no love, put love – and you will find love.”

Today, on *World Marriage Sunday*, we joyfully celebrate a love beyond words shared between a husband and wife in the marital covenant. We pray for all married couples called to be imitators of Christ’s sacrificial love in the world. May their marriages be bright beacons of hope to family members and friends, living reminders of Jesus’ love as they create nurturing homes, wellsprings of hospitality where the warmth of Jesus’ love is shared and felt.

One of the blessings of marriage is the gift of children. Parents are the first teachers to their children, especially in the way of love. Where love is shared abundantly in a family, the family becomes a school of love, especially for children who watch their parents love each other with every gesture and expression of self-giving. Children notice every hug, kiss, sacrifice, and loving glance. May parents strive to mirror Christ’s tender love before their children.

Jesus’ healing of the leper is a beautiful example for us. Jesus’ love heals. Only His tremendous love can save and free us. Like the leper, we must kneel in faith and beg for Jesus the Divine Physician to enter into where we need healing or are bound by sin, to enter marriages that are hurting, to heal our families by His love from any division, anger, or resentment, to mend every human heart, and to bind up the wounds of the human family throughout the world with His healing and salvific love.

Like the psalmist, we pray, “I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you filled me with the joy of salvation.” Lay your hand upon us and may the world overflow with your healing love. Amen.

Summary Points

- The encounter with Jesus and the leper reminds us of love’s healing power
- Jesus’ miracles of healing were evidence that He was the Messiah
- When the leper pleads for healing, Jesus heals Him
- Filled with joy, the leper proclaims his healing

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*. Vaticana: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2005, no. 1.



- Leprosy in the Old Testament was a cause for complete separation from the community
- There was no hope for a leper
- The Gospel of Mark and the reading from Leviticus offer a stark contrast between hopelessness and the hope experienced through Jesus' healing love
- An experience of encountering Jesus' love changes a person
- Our witness of Jesus' healing love gives concrete proof to the world that His love is real
- People need to see and feel Christ's love in us. Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Love alone is credible."
- St. John Paul II, "Love is the vocation of every human being."
- St. John Paul II, our testimony is "a sign and source of hope and love in the world."
- God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (1 Jn 4:16)
- St. John of the Cross, "Where there is no love, put love – and you will find love."
- Married love is a symbol of Christ's sacrificial love, a beacon of hope
- Parents are the first teachers of their children, and reflection of Christ's tender love
- Jesus' healing of the leper is a beautiful example for us of Jesus' tender love
- Let us turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and lay your healing hand upon us. Fill the world with your healing love.



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