

Pastor's Note

Sixth Sunday on Ordinary Time ~ 11 February 2018

“If you wish, you can make me whole.” Mark 1:40

I once visited a leper colony in the Philippines when I worked with ERDA (Educational Research and Development Assistance) group of Foundations. One of the foundations, Foundation for the Assistance to Hansenites (FAHAN), was established in 1978 in response to the growing needs of people affected by the disease. It also provides educational assistance to children of leprosy patients. I meant to just see and evaluate the project of the community but I ended up having lunch with them – not without reservation or precaution even though I knew they could no longer infect others because of the medicines they took. Yet and still, I caught myself thinking the “what ifs” and saying to myself “OMG... no touching please”. But I kept getting smiles and hospitality from them especially the children so I kept on eating. Then, on my way back to my hotel and taking a very prolonged shower, it dawned on me about this encounter in our Gospel this Sunday.

When the man fell on his knees and pleaded, “If you wish, you can make me clean” – I wonder what thoughts first ran through Jesus’ head? That first moment he laid eyes on him, what did he actually see? It was claimed that Jesus was filled with pity and healed the leper and made him clean.

But strangely he did not do it the way everyone expects a God to react – through a word or even just a thought. Either one would have been enough and would have done the job quite efficiently. Rather, Jesus chose to heal the leper in a most human way – by stretching out his hand and by touching him.

Jesus must have seen something in him that moved him to heal him in such a physical and intimate way. He did not have to, but he did. Here was someone so long deprived of human touch, starving for years for some kind of physical contact and Jesus reached out to him and touched his skin in full view of his stunned crowd of followers.

It took so little from Jesus - just a little time and just a gentle touch – but it must have meant so much to the person.

What a difference it must have made. By touching him, Jesus showed him just how much he cared for him and how much he wanted people to see that. By looking at him the way Jesus did, he saw himself in Jesus’ eyes and perhaps for the first time in a very long time, he remembered the person that he had once been, a person fully capable of being loved, and he regained the self-worth that he had lost.

“If you wish, you can make me whole.” We are wounded people and have many battle scars and history of detours and dead ends but God wills that we shall be whole again. Sometimes it is easy for us to forget that we have a God who is very human and knows what it means to suffer and be isolated from the crowd – being left alone. But Jesus never forgets who He is – a beloved Son of the Father.

Let this be our prayer today: Jesus, as we wait for Your touch, let us remember again who we are; grant that we also lay our eyes and hands on those around us in the way that you do. Amen.

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