Reading I: Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

TIME FOR A CLEAN-UP! As we enter the second year of a Global Pandemic, we continue to focus on wearing masks, washings hands, wiping pews with sanitized wipes and social distancing. Cleanliness and sanitation is necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The readings this Sunday remind us that a physical illness has multiple dimensions, - medical, religious, social, and financial. They remind us that we often condemn others, because they are from a different, race, religion, gender, age, economic status, or political party. We live in a world that create ethnic, racial, economic, health and political lepers. When we do so, it is time for us to seek the mighty healing hand of Jesus the Christ. It is time for a clean-up. It is time to remember that in baptism we are called to be holy.

The First Reading describes how the Law functioned to protect the community from an uncontrollable infectious disease. It functioned as their Center of Disease Control. Lepers were to dwell apart and be considered outcasts to live in deserted places. Similarly, today the COVID-19 infection requires quarantine and isolation. The Hebrews thought that cleanliness was next to godliness, as the Book of Leviticus contains definitions of legal and spiritual purity. Verses 1-2; 45-46, proscribed the method of keeping the community from leprosy, a detestable disease. It was the duty of the Levite, or priestly class, to determine the cleanliness of the people. To them physical cleanliness represented holiness. Aaron was the first Chief Priest of Israel and all his sons were associated in the priesthood. They were holy men. Jesus referenced these proscriptions in the Gospel. It was the Levite’s duty to offer sacrifices and also to assist priests in the offering of sacrifices and other acts of divine worship. Any infectious skin diseases, including leprosy, made a person unfit to take part in religious rites (vv. 1-3). To protect others, he/she was isolated until cured. Today we use the method of quarantine. Leprosy at that time had no cure. COVID-19 vaccines are just being developed. The isolation of a leper was complete. So is a person on a ventilator suffering from COVID-19. Not only was a leper isolated by the community, but the leper also had to isolate him/herself by appearance and warning others not to come near him. If we test positive for COVID-19, we too must self-isolate. If you were a leper, you would need a physical and spiritual cleanup. To be clean a leper needed the approval of a Levite. Today, we trust the medical profession for our physical illnesses, and Jesus for our physical and spiritual clean-up. DISCUSSION QUESTION: How do you create outcasts in your community??

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

TIME FOR A CLEAN-UP! St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians seems to be a call for them to clean up their Christian activities. In Chapter 10, he warned against over confidence while assuring them that God is faithful. He assured them that their faith would be tested in this life. He warned against idolatry.

There were pagan temples in Corinth which offered sacrifices to gods. The meat not burnt was often sold in the public market. Some Christians had concerns about eating such meat. St. Paul declared that meat sacrifices to idols was demon worship (20-33). While he preached that God created all things and a person was free to eat what God has provided, that freedom did not include idol worship. A person, therefore, should not eat such meat, if doing so prevented someone from following Christ.

In verses 10:32 and 11:1, St. Paul summed up his admonitions with the general rule of mutual responsibility. Since he imitated Christ, he offered himself as a model. This method, grounded in Jesus Christ, would assist both the Corinthians and us to clean up our spiritual mess. DISCUSSION QUESTION: Does “religious freedom” allow for the abuse of others?
**Gospel: Mark 1:40-45**

**TIME FOR A CLEAN-UP!** It has been said that God dances with the outcasts. If this is true, then who are the “outcasts” today and where is God dancing these days? "Outcasts" today are those who we have cast out. We cast out people who are different because of religion, race, culture, gender, ethnicity, or politics. We even make members of our own families “outcasts.” The violent insurrection against our democratic government shows the violent effects of creating outcasts. We build walls costing millions of dollars to keep out those we don’t like. If God dances with the “outcasts,” we might be missing the divine dance. If we are not dancing with God’s favorite dance partners, it is time for a cleanup. As we move towards the Season of Lent, it is time to clear out our intolerant attitudes. It is time to love more. It is time to forgive more. It is time for a clean-up.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus cured all sorts of diseases and cast out many demons (Mk. 1:21-34). Leprosy was a loathsome and incurable disease. There were only two instances in the Old Testament when God cured a leper (Num. 12:12-15 and 2 Kgs 5:1-14). Therefore, the cure of the leper is one of the greatest miracles. The Gospel of Mark places this miracle early in Jesus’ ministry to show that He is the Christ, the Son of God.

The leper, an outcast, needed a physical and spiritual clean-up. Perhaps the leper heard of Jesus’ ministry of curing and casting out demons and he approached Jesus with hope and faith. He was isolated spiritually and physically from his family, and community. The leper’s bold approach to Jesus violated Jewish law and risked further ostracism and humiliation. What risk will you take to clean up those habits that separate you from the presence of God?

In reverence (Ps 22:30) and pleading (Ps 95:6), he knelt and asked Jesus to heal him, if He wished to do so. His attitude showed his fervent faith in the power of Jesus to heal and restore him. It also showed the leper’s recognition of his need for a spiritual, and physical clean-up. How desperate are you for the healing power of Jesus?

Jesus was moved with compassion, stretched out His hand, and cured him (vv. 41-42). Jesus’ power and holiness prevented His defilement, as He touched the leper. Jesus’ stern warning and dismissal may have been directed to the demon, rather than to the leper. His instructions for the leper to show himself to the priest showed Jesus’ fulfillment of the Old Testament, not its destruction. Ironically, the inclusion of the leper into the community caused Jesus’ exclusion, as He could not enter towns openly and was forced to go to deserted places, the places where the leper had been. In a sense, Jesus became the outcast. Are you willing to become an outcast for the benefit of others?

Remember, God dances with the outcasts. Jesus came to cure the sick, free the imprisoned, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and welcome the immigrant. As we approach the Season of Lent, let us clean up our wickedness for a dance with God. Let’s replace hate with love, anger with peace, fear with confidence, vengeance with forgiveness, and doubt with hope. It is time for a clean-up. Lord, create in me a clean heart so I can serve you.

**PRAY ABOUT IT!**

**Monday**
Read 1 Corinthians 10:20. What does it mean to drink the cup of the Lord?

**Tuesday**
Call someone who is sick or shut in.

**Wednesday**
Learn something about a different religion or Christian denomination.

**Thursday**
Read Psalm 95:6. How should you view changes in others?

**Friday**
Perform an Act of Spiritual Communion.

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**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHES THAT THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION CAN CLEAN YOU UP.**

1446 Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as “the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace.”


This meditation is prepared by Deacon Terrel J. Broussard for personal use in Adult Faith Formation at St. Maria Goretti, Blessed Sacrament, St. Joan of Arc, St. Augustine, and St. Peter Claver Parishes in New Orleans, La. ©2021.