

ORDINARY SUNDAY VI “B”
Communal Anointing of the Sick

FEBRUARY 11/12, 2012

In today’s Gospel, Jesus is confronted by a man begging to be made clean from the scourge of leprosy. As today’s first reading makes clear, not only did those afflicted with this disease have to suffer from its awful physical effects, but we also see how leprosy came with an additional curse of isolation and separation from the community. This made the physical suffering much worse because it took away all human contact, all support, and left the sufferer with no help and no hope.

Jesus, on the other hand, makes no attempt to move away from the leper. Moved by compassion, the deep gut-wrenching response that identifies with the suffering of another (the term itself from the Latin meaning “to suffer with”) Jesus stretches out his hand to touch him and affirm his choice to heal him. How long had it been since the leper had felt the touch of another human being on his diseased flesh, had heard words of affirmation rather than insult?

This weekend as a parish we sacramentally make present Jesus’ same healing ministry among us. In the celebration of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick we literally reach out and touch those among us who are physically sick and suffering through the sacramental gestures of the laying on of hands and the anointing with the blessed Oil of the Sick. Both of these gestures are significant. The laying on of hands is a sign of our willingness not to isolate but to embrace the sick as members of our community in imitation of Jesus. The anointing with blessed oil expresses our prayer that the sick may experience Jesus’ gift of healing committed by him now to the church, whether of body, mind or spirit.

This weekend we also are invited to join in Jesus’ healing ministry through our annual financial contribution to the annual appeal by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese. Those among us who have made a donation in the past will receive a letter from Catholic Charities next week requesting our continued financial support. If

you have not made a donation you can write a check noting on it “Catholic Charities” and place it in the regular collection and we will see that your gift is forwarded to Catholic Charities. You can also visit the Catholic Charities website and make a secure online donation. As always, no gift is too great or too small.

No matter what afflicts people in our communities, whether it be unemployment and a lack of affordable housing, the stigma of a criminal record, single parenthood, a mental health condition, refugee status, a troubled marriage or numerous other hardships that can make people feel or actually experience “leper” like isolation, Catholic Charities is there with people and programs to help reduce the pain and eliminate the despair and isolation that hardship causes. The individuals and families Catholic Charities serve are wonderful deserving people, who like the leper in the Gospel, have fallen on hard times. A vast majority of the clients served through Catholic Charities programs have household incomes that fall below the federal poverty level, which is just a little over \$26,000 for a family of five. With the exception of Catholic Charities affordable housing program, Charities receives no government funding, which is why our support of this annual appeal is so important.

The Good News that Jesus represents and is ritually celebrated today in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is the same that Catholic Charities embraces, that no individual should ever be alone in his or her suffering. We all bear a responsibility for our brothers and sisters, and our call is to surround them with the compassion of Jesus in order to give them the help and hope they deserve as children of God.