

ORDINARY SUNDAY VI "B"  
FEBRUARY 10/11, 2018

In the time before all the various forms of social media we have today there existed only the land-line telephone. In an attempt to encourage people to use its "long distance direct dial service" the phone company ran ads encouraging people to pick up the phone and "reach out and touch someone".

There are many ways we "touch" each other: physically, the use of a variety of social media, conversation, or the old-fashioned way of a handwritten letter or note. Whatever the method, it sends a message of inclusion, belonging. Being "out of touch" is the experience of isolation, exclusion.

In the Bible the sick or handicapped individual or groups experienced "being out of touch", excluded because of the fear (real or cultural) of others contracting the same illness and also because the sick were seen (religiously) as sinners publicly bearing divine punishment physically for their sin. This is the case with the leper in today's Gospel. For anyone to "reach out and touch" a leper by coming into proximity of them, talking to them, much less physically touching them was punishable by Jewish religious law of the one doing so also being excluded, being rendered "out of touch", also labeled "unclean", sinful.

In "reaching out and touching" the leper, Jesus reveals he and his mission are one of inclusion. Jesus risks the censure of the community/ the institutional religious establishment as he both cures the leper of his physical disease but by sending him to the Temple priests re-integrates him into the human and religious community.

This weekend through our celebration of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick Jesus comes among us, "reaches out and touches" physically through the laying on of my hands and spiritually through the spoken words of the sacramental formula, the lives of those among us who present themselves to him that he might "save them and raise them up".

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is also a teaching moment for those not receiving it. Sometimes we can succumb to the temptation to attitudes and perceptions of individuals or groups of people and label them “lepers”: those whose beliefs and lifestyles we fear don’t “fit” our image of class and sophistication, whose politics, religion, race, or sexual identity differ from our own. Jesus who heals lepers comes today to us to heal us of our prejudices, our debilitating sense of self that blinds us to the sacredness and dignity of those we physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually segregate as “lepers”, to heal us of our “leprosy” so that we were able to realize that God extends his compassion and grace even to the likes of us. Before God, no one is a leper, no one is beyond the reach of God’s mercy and compassion; all of us are made in the sacred image of the God of justice, peace, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and mercy.

We now join together in prayer and celebration of the God who in Jesus walks among us and “reaches out and touches us.”