

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

11.02.24

Fr. Bill Edebohls

- Leprosy is now known as Hansen's Disease after the Norwegian physician that discovered the *leprae* bacterium in 1868.
- But the disease called leprosy that we read about in the gospels covered a wide range of skin conditions from eczema, fungal infections, cold sores, right through to the feared leprosy or Hansen's disease.
- A leper – shunned, unclean, outsider, feared, excluded, was not allowed to live with you, work with you, go to school with you, worship with you.
- In the gospel we hear that Jesus on meeting the leper 'felt sorry for him'.
- Well that's rubbish – Jesus didn't feel 'sorry' for him - and it's not what the Greek original says. The Greek word St. Mark uses in the gospel is not the word for being sorry or having pity but the word for anger. Or, more accurately, it translates into something like – "his guts churned with anger!" (I suspect the translators may have thought such words might be deemed inappropriate on the lips of Jesus and we don't like the idea of Jesus being full of gut-wrenching anger)
- But, we cannot escape the fact that according to St. Mark, Jesus was angry. Very angry. And it wouldn't be the last time he was angry.
- We often think anger is wrong – but no – anger is morally neutral – it's what we do with our anger that determines its moral quality.
- Anger tells us something is wrong. It's an important and valuable emotion.
- Jesus is angry because he is confronting a social system that robbed people of their human dignity, and religious laws that robbed them of hope – Jesus was confronting social exclusion.
- Jesus healing of the leper is not just about healing an illness. He is healing relationships, oppression, injustice, and exclusion.
- He is teaching us a lesson in community.
- No one should be excluded, no one turned away, no one is unclean, no one an outsider.
- We are all called into community – as neighbours, as family, as friends, as a community of faith.
- One of the most important things that we must learn is that our community, parish, nation, or Church must never treat anyone like a leper. An outsider – and if it does - we, like Jesus, ought to be angry.
- And that anger must be used in a positive way to tear down the barriers that divide so that the healing hands of Christ (your hands and mine) may heal, reconcile, and include.
- As you prepare for the season of Lent maybe you can think about those we exclude or keep on the fringes, those that our nation, community or Church excludes or keeps on the fringes - and if you feel no anger ask yourself why.
- And if you do feel anger then own it - and speak it – it is part of your baptismal ministry as prophet – speaking truth to power.