

2015

- The Gospel shows the great compassion of Jesus...and, therefore, the great compassion of God.
- In Jesus' time lepers were outcast...not allowed to approach anyone who were not themselves lepers.
- But when this leper comes and begs Jesus for healing, Jesus does not shrink away, or even rebuke him.
- *“Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean.” ...[and] the leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean.”*
- What a wonderful image of God's love for us.
  
- But from this story arises also the age-old mystery: why does an all-powerful, all-compassionate and loving God allow suffering?
- The Book of Job, specifically about suffering--especially the suffering of those who are good and righteous--emphasizes that we, the created, cannot know the overall plan of the Creator...just as a work of art cannot know the plan and mind of the artist.
- Yet even the dark colors in a painting contribute largely, and perhaps even essentially, to the beauty of the whole.
- How many of us are older and look back on periods of suffering and difficulty, and see that they have made us stronger and wiser and, hopefully, better.
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- One of the favorite readings at funerals is chapter 3 of the book of Wisdom: *“...the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God... Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them.* (Wisdom 3:1-7)
- No, we cannot know the overall plan of God, but there is no suffering that cannot be turned to good, though we may not see it...for God would not allow evil if some good could not come from it. It seems paradoxical to us...but with God, nothing is impossible.
- We see this early in the Bible. Remember Jacob's (Israel's) son Joseph...so hated by his brothers and they sold him as a slave?

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- But he later became powerful in Egypt... and through his wisdom saves all the land from a terrible famine.
- His brothers came trembling before him, fearing his vengeance.
- But Joseph simply assured them: *“Fear not, for am I in the place of God?...you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive...”* (Gen 50:19-20 RSV)
- So...even our suffering is in some way in the plan of God, and for a greater good. As God tells us through the prophet Isaiah: *“...as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* (Isa 55:9 RSV)
- For instance, the leper in the Gospel doesn’t complain to Jesus: *“Why did God makes me thus?”*
- He simply comes to Jesus *in faith* (*“If you will, you can make me clean.”*) and asks for healing...and with that profession of faith, Jesus heals.
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- Trials and hardships can make us more attentive to the good...and make us more grateful for what we have.
- And it is not what happens TO us that is important; it is what happens WITHIN us that is essential...and how we manifest that interiority...and how we face that hardship.
- Whom do we admire?—the one who whimpers and cowers before hardship...or rather the one who stands calm, firm and steadfast in the face of the storm?
- And if God allows suffering to come to us, it is an opportunity to come closer to Him...through repentance and through humble acceptance of His will...and to be an example to others of unwavering faith.
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- But we should try to alleviate suffering—especially of others.
- Suffering of others is our opportunity for charity. Indeed, that may be even why certain sufferings are allowed to exist—in order that acts of mercy may be accomplished...that virtue may be cultivated.
- When asked why a man was born blind, Jesus answered: *“It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God*

*might be made manifest in him.*” (Joh 9:3 RSV) And Jesus shows what is to be done by giving the man his sight...showing mercy.

- And one can rest assured that he who suffers in this life through no fault of his own is recompensed a hundredfold and more by Our Loving Father in Heaven...if he continues to walk in faith.
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- In the end, the purpose of all suffering is to bring us back to God... to bring us to kneel at the feet of Jesus like the leper...knowing that God wants nothing but our good—not so much of our bodies, but of our souls.
- And that’s why Paul says: “...*we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope ...*” (Rom 5:3-4 RSV)

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- Now sin is our self-imposed suffering. OUR leprosy.
  - When we come to Jesus and kneel before Him in faith and sincere repentance, asking for healing...He will not refuse us. He will look upon US with compassion...reach out and touch us, and we are healed.
  - And we do this by bending the knee of our hearts in humility before Him in the confessional... confessing our leprosy and receiving absolution. Being healed.
  - One of the first things that the risen Jesus does is to appear to the apostles, and: “...*he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."* (John 20:22-23 RSV)...and thus instituting sacramental confession.
  - The priest is simply God’s unworthy instrument...the ear to hear, the arm to touch the leper. God alone forgives.
  - As Catholics, we are bound by the Church to confess our mortal sins at least once a year, and that during Lent.
  - But why wait? Why endure a leprosy that disgusts both angels and saints...when we can be cleansed in a moment in a good confession...when we are truly sorry for sin, and resolve to try not to sin again.
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- Now speaking of leprosy and disease, I would feel remiss if I did not mention this current movie “50 Shades of Grey”.
- Our poor young people—such mixed messages in our society. It is no wonder they are often so confused about the proper place of sexuality in their lives.
- We try to teach young men to respect women, to treat them with kindness, and that “no” means “no”. We teach young ladies to respect themselves...to demand respect for themselves and for their bodies. We teach both that sex is for marriage...that marriage is a sacramental, holy, permanent and exclusive gift of love of one to the other.
- And yet...along comes this book, this movie, which promotes sexuality as temporary business relationship. That women are commodities, and like to be abused. What does that promote except that...when she says “no”, she really means “yes”?
- So...when we buy such books and see such movies, our money goes to promote and reward producers of such ideas...just as when a person buys illegal drugs, he helps finance all these murders and tortures we see down on the border.
- If we’re honest with ourselves, we know that we don’t go to such movies for their “literary value”: it’s not exactly Shakespeare... but rather go simply for a childish and illicit sexual thrill.
- And the great cloud of witnesses of the angels and the saints weep.
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- Why seek to be infected with leprosy? Seek only the good things that God approves...the things which actually edify our spirits.
- To avoid infection is better than to apply medicine...the old “an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure” wisdom.
- Imagine the joy of the leper, healed from the disease of his body.
- How much more so do we rejoice in the curing of the disease of our souls...resting in God’s approval...and cured by His immense compassion and love.

**Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Lectionary: 77**

Reading 1 Lv 13:1-2, 44-46

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The Lord said to Moses and Aaron,  
"If someone has on his skin a scab or pustule or blotch  
which appears to be the sore of leprosy,  
he shall be brought to Aaron, the priest,  
or to one of the priests among his descendants.  
If the man is leprous and unclean,  
the priest shall declare him unclean  
by reason of the sore on his head.

"The one who bears the sore of leprosy  
shall keep his garments rent and his head bare,  
and shall muffle his beard;  
he shall cry out, 'Unclean, unclean!'  
As long as the sore is on him he shall declare himself unclean,  
since he is in fact unclean.  
He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp."

Responsorial Psalm Ps 32:1-2, 5, 11

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R. (7) I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.  
Blessed is he whose fault is taken away,  
whose sin is covered.  
Blessed the man to whom the LORD imputes not guilt,  
in whose spirit there is no guile.  
R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.  
Then I acknowledged my sin to you,  
my guilt I covered not.  
I said, "I confess my faults to the LORD,"  
and you took away the guilt of my sin.  
R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.  
Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you just;  
exult, all you upright of heart.  
R. I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

Reading 2 1 Cor 10:31-11:1

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Brothers and sisters,  
Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,  
do everything for the glory of God.  
Avoid giving offense, whether to the Jews or Greeks or  
the church of God,  
just as I try to please everyone in every way,  
**not seeking my own benefit but that of the many,**

that they may be saved.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Gospel Mk 1:40-45

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A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said,  
"If you wish, you can make me clean."  
Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand,  
touched him, and said to him,  
"I do will it. Be made clean."  
The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean.  
Then, warning the him sternly, he dismissed him at once.

He said to him, "See that you tell no one anything,  
but go, show yourself to the priest  
and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed;  
that will be proof for them."

The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter.  
He spread the report abroad  
so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly.  
He remained outside in deserted places,  
and people kept coming to him from everywhere.