

Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis
Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Feb. 13-14, 2021, Cycle B

This past Thursday, February 11th, was the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, and the World Day of the Sick, proclaimed by Pope St. John Paul II in 1992. On this day we remember the many healings that have happened at Lourdes through the intercession of Mary. St. John Paul was calling on us to hold always in our prayer those who are sick, disabled, suffering and in need of healing. Especially during this time we heed the former Pope's call as we are so conscious of those suffering from the coronavirus and dying from COVID-19.

The Gospel passage from Mark we read this weekend about Jesus healing a man with leprosy is so timely then, as the sick and suffering are so much on our mind. Last weekend we heard Mark's story about Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law, this weekend the man with leprosy. These stories about sickness and healing are also so appropriate for us to reflect on and pray over as we enter Lent seeking Jesus' healing in our own pain we suffer. Mark's stories of Jesus' healings comfort us and assure us of Jesus' intense desire to heal our brokenness and make us whole. All of us can approach Jesus with confidence in His compassion for us.

The Leper appeals to Jesus' compassion! He pleads with Jesus: "If you wish, you can make me clean!" And Mark tells us Jesus "was moved with pity", at the sight of the poor man, knowing that others considered the leper unclean and untouchable, ostracized him and forced him to live in isolation.

Jesus, then, does the unthinkable and definitely not permitted. Jesus touches the leper, and says: "I will do it. Be made clean." If ever Jesus had wanted to demonstrate that popularity was not his goal, touching a leper did the trick. At that very moment, Jesus became ceremonially unclean; he incapacitated himself for entering temple or synagogue. Jesus breaks the norms, and offers physical touch as an element of healing. Jesus reveals that God is bonded with the sick and the outcast – and with those who need their bodies and souls touched with healing.

What good news, what comforting news during a pandemic in which we cannot touch each other for fear of spreading disease! How much we all have longed to hug our elderly parents, and they long to hug their grandchildren and families back in return. Touch is so important an element in the healing process – both physically and spiritually. Jesus reveals that He never stops touching us.

Mark's Gospel story reminds us to treat all people, especially the sick, with dignity, care and respect. Shaming or humiliating the afflicted and disabled is never acceptable. We are all broken, wounded or sick in some way. Lent is our time to kneel before Jesus and beg: "If you wish, you can make me clean;" and Jesus, moved with pity, will reach out, touch us, and say "I will do it. Be made clean."