

6 OT Year B Readings and Commentary

Commentary by Dale J. Sieverding: Popularity is a dangerous animal. If a person today were able to get rid of people's problems, indeed, he or she would be popular indeed. This miracle worker might even have problems having a life of his/her own. What is the challenge? For the person diligently following Christ, there is no *me, my or I*, there is only the constant dying to self, giving of oneself so that the glory of God may be known. Paul was turned around to understand the all-encompassing demand to follow Jesus and be like him. "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ." The call to be Christian leads us down a path not of our choosing, but of the Lord. Are you ready? Are you willing? Can you be led? Get your ego out of the way and let Christ lead you.

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First Reading Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

A reading from the Book of Leviticus

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."

The word of the Lord.

Commentary Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46 by Tom Conry: This selection from Leviticus is an excellent demonstration of the complex relationship between illness and the community in the Ancient Near East. Arthur Kleinman (among others) has famously explored the distinct ways illness and health are socially constructed in different societies. For modern western society (i.e.

people like us), medicine largely consists of *curing disease*. In places like modern America, what we understand as "disease" is something that happens to an individual, and good therapy involves a scientific attempt to restore the person to health, i.e. a non-diseased state. In the (mostly) pre-literate world of ancient Palestine, medicine is much more concerned with *healing illness*, i.e. the restoration of the person to the community.

At the center of this stands the authority of the temple priesthood to determine who is in and who is out of the community. Just take a look at the verses that have been omitted in the lectionary selection – they dramatically underline this authority! The concern for the power to name who is in and who is out of the community is characteristic of a society that is under attack or occupation by foreign influence – an apt thumbnail description of most of the ancient history of the Israeli people. As the noted anthropologist Mary Douglas emphasizes, these kinds of purity concerns are rooted in the social and political situation of communities who are in danger of being swallowed up by their neighbors.

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

℟(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.

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.

Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you just;
exult, all you upright of heart.

Commentary Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 11 by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: When we confess our sinfulness, God takes away our guilt.

This responsorial from Psalm 32 is in response to today's first reading from the Book of Leviticus, which lays down the priestly instructions involving lepers. In the biblical tradition diseases were thought to be the result of sinfulness. Sin and sickness were like two sides of the same coin. In addition, the contagiousness of the "unclean" condition of leprosy meant that

lepers were excommunicated from the worshipping assembly. Jesus' healing of the leper in today's Gospel reading thus implicitly includes the forgiveness of his sins. This healing and forgiveness allows the leper to return to the community to praise God for his forgiveness, as expressed in today's responsorial psalm.

Today's responsorial psalm thus calls upon all who experience the effects of sinfulness in their lives--the frustration and lack of vitality that our sins can cause--to rejoice in God's forgiveness. When we are willing to acknowledge and confess our sinfulness to God, he is ready and willing to take away the guilt of our sins--"Blessed the man to whom the Lord imputes not guilt!"

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Second Reading 1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

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.

The word of the Lord.

Commentary 1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1 by Tom Conry: Paul's basic argument throughout this section of the letter is that individualism undermines the solidarity of the group, even if the actions of the individual might be lawful. The verses that we read today are a kind of summary of the preceding section, in which Paul urges the members of the community not to seek their own personal advantage, but rather the advantage of the other (10:24; 11:1). This kind of group consciousness is what Paul means when he declares, "do everything for the glory of God" (10:31) and "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (11:1).

It should also be noted that this entire discussion of social practice – which foods may be eaten, which meals might be attended – is not only a discussion of group ethics but also of economics. As exegete Richard Horsley notes, "Sacrifice was integral to, indeed constitutive of, community life in

Greco-Roman antiquity at every social level from extended families to guilds and associations to citywide celebrations, including imperial festivals" (Horsley 1997:247). We know that this was a huge issue from other letters of Paul and, later on, from the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan. In several cities the refusal of the Christian communities to partake in the feasts of the emperor cult was considered an economic threat, even an act of sedition. In other words, Paul is not trying to salve or cajole individual consciences so much as he is trying to organize the group to operate from a radically different orientation than the one presented by the empire.

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Gospel Acclamation Luke 7:16

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

A great prophet has arisen in our midst,
God has visited his people.

Gospel Mark 1:40-45

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

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 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.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Commentary Mark 1:40-45 by Virginia Smith: This passage typifies Mark's themes and writing style. Lacking even a modified infancy narrative, the second Gospel moves quickly to Jesus' public ministry. By the time we arrive at today's healing of the leper, we have already heard about the cure of the demoniac and of Simon's mother-in-law together with many others. "*The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases...*" And this is only Chapter One! Our assumption would be quite correct that healing is going to be one of Jesus' leading attributes for Mark.

We also see Jesus in action. One cheeky commentator remarked that if Jesus ever sat down, Mark does not record it. If the first twelve chapters are read in a single sitting, the reader becomes almost breathless from the hectic pace that's set.

Today's reading also brings our first exposure to Mark's messianic secret. Although it is found to some degree in Matthew and Luke, this literary technique is primarily Mark's. Following a healing, Jesus says, "*See that you tell no one anything...*" Why? Scholars have debated this for years, coming to the general consensus that Mark doesn't want Jesus' miracles to overshadow Jesus himself. The leper, of course, ignores the admonition, and can you blame him? We, too, have been cured of many spiritual, emotional, and psychological problems over our lifetimes. Do we acknowledge God's hand in our return to health, much less tell others what God has done for us. Mark notwithstanding, such blessings should probably be shared.

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