



Mark 1:40-45

40 A leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his knees: 'If you want to,' he said, 'you can cure me.' 41 Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. 'Of course I want to!' he said. 'Be cured!' 42 And the leprosy left him at once and he was cured. 43 Jesus immediately sent him away and sternly ordered him, 44 'Mind you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest, and make the offering for your healing prescribed by Moses as evidence of your recovery.' 45 The man went away, but then started talking about it freely and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived. Even so, people from all around would come to him.

Other readings: Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46 Psalm 31 (32) I Corinthians 10:31-11:1

We continue to read from the opening chapter of the Gospel of Mark, and once again we are told about a healing worked by Jesus. This time it is the healing of a leper. In his desperation the leper violates the rules about keeping away from people. The reaction of Jesus mirrors the compassion of God. When our text says that Jesus 'felt sorry for him' this points to the deep compassion of the loving God.

What is perhaps most remarkable about this miracle is that 'Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him'. Our first reading from the Book of Leviticus tells how lepers used to be taken to a priest and formally declared to be 'unclean'. They were banished and had to live apart. This was still the practice in Jesus' day.

Jesus' attitude is completely different. He is not afraid to violate the law by reaching out and touching the leper. In this way Jesus challenges the rules about what is 'clean', and what is 'unclean'.

In this miracle story it is by his touch and a simple word of command that Jesus heals the man. Perhaps surprisingly Jesus then orders the healed man to comply with the law by going to a priest and making a thanksgiving offering for his recovery.

Jesus orders the man to tell nobody about his healing. This is a rather curious feature of the gospel, which shows that Jesus did not want popularity and was anxious that his work should not be misunderstood. But in his enthusiasm at being healed the man proclaims the word everywhere. The gospel ends with the irony that, while the leper rejoins society, Jesus the healer stays outside 'in places where nobody lived'.

What does Jesus' acceptance of the leper teach us?

How do I try to reach out to those who are rejected by society?

Let us pray for a spirit of compassion and understanding.

Let us share the healed man's enthusiasm to make known the goodness of God.