

A reading from the book of Leviticus.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:
“When a person has on the skin of his body
a swelling or an eruption or a spot,
and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of his body,
that person shall be brought to Aaron the priest
or to one of his sons the priests.
Anyone who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes
and let the hair of their head be dishevelled;
and he shall cover their upper lip and cry out,
‘Unclean, unclean.’
That person shall remain unclean as long as the disease persists;
and being unclean, such a one shall live alone;
with their dwelling outside the camp.”

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PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – B 6

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,
do everything for the glory of God.

Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks
or to the Church of God,

just as I try to please everyone in everything I do,
not seeking my own advantage, but that of many,
so that they may be saved.

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – B 6

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord

A man with leprosy came to Jesus begging him,
and kneeling said to Jesus,
“If you choose, you can make me clean.”
Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him,
and said to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!”
Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.
After sternly warning him he sent him away at once,
saying to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone;
but go, show yourself to the priest,
and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded,
as a testimony to them.”
But he went out and began to proclaim it freely,
and to spread the word,
so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly,
but stayed out in the country;
and people came to Jesus from every quarter.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

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

The Book of Leviticus embodies much early legislation, but in its final form it is the work of the priestly school (P) after the Babylonian Exile. Today's reading is the beginning and the end of the section dealing with leprosy.

This disease was not precisely what modern medicine classifies as Hansen's disease but included many other skin diseases that were temporary in character. Such diseases were serious not merely because of their contagious character, assumed or real, but because they were thought to make the patient spiritually unclean and therefore unfit to participate in the community's worship.

Rules were set up for quarantine. The patient had to report to the priest, who diagnosed the malady, not as a physician, but as the minister of the Torah, and decided on the length of the quarantine, which involved a second visit to the priest—the one referred to in today's gospel.

Obviously, this passage was selected as background reading for the gospel story.

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

Psalm 32 is one of the traditional seven penitential psalms. Today it is regarded rather as a wisdom psalm (see the beatitudes of the first stanza) incorporating a thanksgiving. This psalm plays a key role in Paul's argument about justification and was prominent in the controversies of the Reformation (see the word "imputes" in the first stanza).

Evidently this psalm is used today because leprosy serves as a symbol for human sin. Just as the leper reports to the priest, so the sinner comes and confesses to YHWH (second stanza) and receives forgiveness from him (first stanza).

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

The context of these rather general-sounding remarks is a discussion of a further problem raised in the Corinthians' letter, namely, the question of eating things sacrificed to idols.

Christians at Corinth invited out to dinner were often offered meat that had been previously used in pagan sacrifices. The butchers would naturally stock such meat. Was it permissible to eat it? As instructed Christians, the Corinthians knew that the idols to which the meat had been sacrificed were non-existent.

Paul insists, however, that the Christians should not vaunt their knowledge over against their weaker Christian brothers and sisters who had scruples (Jewish Christians, perhaps) or their pagan neighbors who took a malicious delight in making an issue of the matter to embarrass their Christian guests. So Paul lays down certain rules.

It is not the food or drink in themselves that are holy, unholy, or neutral but the effect that the Christians' behavior will have on other persons. The scrupulous might be scandalized, and an opportunity

to bear witness before one's pagan neighbors might be lost. So the general rule is: Do everything to the glory of God and try to please all people (in the sense of not giving them offense).

As a final rule of thumb, Paul says, "Be imitators of me." He can ask the Corinthians to do that without a trace of arrogance because he himself imitates the behavior of Christ.

This must mean more than just following an external ethical example (Paul shows little knowledge of, or interest in, the earthly Jesus or the Jesus tradition). Rather, it must be something like what Paul hints at in Phil 2:6-11—an imitation of the path of Christ when he came down from heaven and humbled himself in his death on the cross.

In his life as an apostle, Paul reproduces the same pattern of self-emptying, humiliation, and suffering. His whole life as an apostle is thus an epiphany of Christ.

[Gospel: Mark 1:40-45](#)

This short miracle story follows the basic threefold pattern common to all such stories. (1) The diagnosis: this is quite briefly indicated by the simple statement that the man was a leper and requested healing. (2) The cure: by word and touch. (3) The demonstration: the command to go and report to the high priest in accordance with the Levitical law (see the first reading).

The third point has been overloaded with the motif of the messianic secret, a fact that shows it to be Marcan redaction. The cured leper is told to say nothing to anyone, but he disobeys this command and his cure becomes the talk of the town. The result is that Jesus withdraws (unsuccessfully) to the country.

Mark adds this motif because of his polemic against the understanding of Jesus as merely a wonder-worker (see our comments on last Sunday's gospel). We saw that Mark uses commands to silence (there it is a command to the demon, here to the cured leper) in order to forestall the misunderstanding of Jesus and to point forward to the supreme miracle of the cross.

A puzzling feature here is the fact that the command to secrecy is disobeyed. The man goes out and freely talks about his cure (cf. similar features in Mark 1:34; 3:13; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26). Evidently we are dealing with a characteristic element in Mark's theory of the messianic secret. It is being repeatedly penetrated.

Since we are dealing with a Marcan construction rather than a historical fact, we have to ask, not what Jesus' purpose was in giving an injunction he must have known would be broken, but what Mark intends theologically by these injunctions to secrecy and their constant breach. The answer would seem to be that Mark wants to show that while the messiahship of God is a mystery that must not be prematurely exposed (because it is rightly understood only in the light of the cross), yet because it is the mystery of God's presence at work in Jesus' words and works, it cannot really be suppressed but must come out.

It comes out, for Mark, in the proclamation of the post-Easter Church, which the irresponsible gossip of the healed leper is meant to foreshadow. The difficulties disappear when we realize that at this point we are dealing not with history but with an artificial theological construction of the evangelist.

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