

14th January, 2021

Thursday, First Week in Ordinary Time

Hebrews 3:7-14 Mark 1:40-45

In today's first reading, the author calls on the Christians he is addressing to ***'keep a grasp on our first confidence right to the end'***. He wants them to keep the faith to the end. In other words, he wants them to endure in their living out of their faith in Christ. He knows that if this happens, they are bound to support one another. This could be the whole area of reflection today. The author of the letter to the Hebrews also calls on the Christians to ***'keep encouraging one another'***.

- We need to encourage one another in the faith,
- We need to support the best in each other, if our faith in the Lord, and the way of life that flows from it, is to endure to the end.

The healing of the leper in the Gospel of today is a striking example of that ministry of encouragement. Lepers lived a very isolated life. If at all there were inbuilt mindsets in any leper, our current "Stay Home," and "Keep Distance" slogans would speak to them of their experience. Lepers were shunned by everybody and they themselves were obliged, much the same as us now, to 'stay where they were, and should they have reason to move about, 'keep distance' from the rest of the population.

To some extent the transmission level of COVID 19 has obliged us to virtually treat everyone else as a leper and, similarly, we in turn, need to treat ourselves as lepers. We are not meant to do this in any cynical way but rather from a perspective of deep-rooted love, concern and respect for each other. If this is missing a greater population in our community is bound to be suffocated from a lack of encouragement. If 'staying home,' and 'observing distance' results in people not receiving encouragement then we have missed the boat. This can bring a feeling of being shunned by all which can be disastrous, as many people could easily end up feeling that their physical distancing is also cutting them off from God.

In throwing himself at the feet of Jesus, that leper was hoping and trusting that in Jesus he would finally find someone who would reveal to him God's encouraging and life-giving love.

His hope and trust did not disappoint him. Jesus healed him of his leprosy not only with a word but with a touch. Jesus often healed people by means of his word, ***'Be cured'***, but here was someone who needed to be touched. He needed to know that God, working in Jesus, could break through his life-draining isolation. As a result of his encounter with Jesus, the leper who had lived in isolation became an evangelist, telling his good news story to others, everywhere.

Jesus is revealing a God who always wants to break through whatever isolation we find ourselves in. The Lord does not do social distancing as we understand it today; he touches us, especially when we are at our most vulnerable and isolated front; he encourages us, wanting to build us up and putting new courage and strength into us.

How can we bring about this ministry of encouragement?

It is by knowing that from staying home, everyone is just a phone call away.

We can always break through each other's isolation by using numerous technological means at hand.

We certainly have many ways of touching each other even as we observe distance. From there we go!