



**Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)
Chinese Catholic Community**

Homily

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Sunday 11 February, 2024
St Pius X Catholic Church, Manning**

Today's gospel is a very beautiful and very striking example of both the power of Jesus over the forces of evil and of his extraordinary compassion, which reveal him to be, as Pope Francis so often reminds us, the face of the Father's mercy. This story also shows the willingness of Jesus to step outside the traditions and customs of his time, if those traditions and customs place a limit on God's merciful compassion.

Most of us are aware that at the time of Jesus, leprosy was considered to be, and in fact almost certainly was, a very contagious and very painful disease. When the leper begins his approach to Jesus by saying "If you want to, you can heal me" the leper is aware that he is asking Jesus to take a great risk. Jesus is running the risk of contracting the disease himself, especially if he touches the leper which, in fact, he actually does.

What we may not also realise is that in the Jewish tradition, to touch a leper would make a person ritually unclean. This would mean that Jesus was unable to fulfil his religious duties and thus, in the Jewish understanding of the time, interfere with the relationship between Jesus and his Father.

In spite of both of these challenges Jesus is moved by compassion for the desperate plight of the man, and so is prepared to take the risk in order to bring God's grace and God's healing into the man's life. In response to the man's statement, Jesus replies immediately. "Of course I want to," he says, "Be cured!"

In today's gospel, however, it is not only Jesus who acts with courage. The leper himself is also brave with a courage which is perhaps born of desperation. He knows how needy he is, he knows how helpless he is to do anything about his situation, and he is filled with a mixture of hope and faith which leads him to plead with Jesus and entrust himself to the God whom he believes is present in Jesus.

Jesus is not only brave and merciful in responding to the leper the way that he does. He is also, in a sense, somewhat foolish. Although he tells the man he has just cured not to say anything to



anybody, but rather to go privately to the priest to make an offering of thanksgiving to God, Jesus must have known that the man would be unable to keep this wonderful story to himself. In this sense it is important to realise that just before the gospel passage we have read this morning we find Jesus escaping into the hills after performing a previous miracle of healing because he did not want people chasing after him because of his miraculous powers. Rather he wanted people to follow him because of the message he was preaching and the news about God's love that he had come to share. But as this morning's gospel makes clear, the result of Jesus's compassion for the leper was that he could no longer go openly into any town but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived. Previously, because of his illness, this had been the leper's problem. Now Jesus, because of his generosity and compassion, suffers the same fate. Now he is unable to enter into towns and villages.

When we put all of this together, we begin to realise that the Jesus who is presented to us in Saint Mark's gospel really is the revelation of the powerful presence of God among us, not just as our creator but also as our loving Father, our compassionate and forgiving Lord, our healer and our Redeemer.

As we gather this morning to give thanks to God for all his blessings, we are invited to renew and deepen our faith in this extraordinary love and compassion which God has for us. We know that we are weak and fragile, and often fail the Lord by the things we do and the things we fail to do. This morning's gospel reminds us that no matter how often we fail Jesus, he will never give up on us. Whenever we turn to him and ask for healing and forgiveness he says to us, as he said to the leper, "Of course I want to heal and forgive you: be healed, be forgiven".