

**Leviticus 13: 1-2, 44-46, 1  
Corinthians 10: 31-11:1,  
Mark 1: 40-45**

*FOCUS: God calls us to care for one another and to worship him as people of God*

*Today's Gospel tells a story of a man with leprosy. In the time of Jesus, diseases were not always well understood and people with skin disorders or deformities were feared and shunned. There was no medical treatment so a person with a suspicious skin lesion was required to remain isolated from the community for seven days. At the end of that time the priest would determine if the person could return to family and society or remain isolated for the safety of the whole population.*

*If you have ever seen pictures of people with leprosy you may have noticed missing fingers and faces distorted by the disease. Such pictures evoke sympathy and pity for the victims. One such photo was of a happy woman, singing and clapping along to hymns of praise to God! "How could such a woman be happy?, one might wonder. How come she did not curse God instead of praise him? The answer was to be found in the rest of the photograph because this woman was not alone. She was surrounded by a worshipping community of parishioners who made her feel a part of the parish, one of them. Herein lies the key to our first reading and Gospel this Sunday. While leprosy still exists in our world today, it is much more understood as the disease it is, rather than as a curse from God. No longer feared in the same way, lepers are not cut off from their families, forced from their communities, and treated as outcasts and untouchables. These latter realities were a part of life in the Israelite community and the world in which Jesus lived. Being sick was hard enough in and of itself, but the social rejection from both society and worshipping community only added to the pain. Those afflicted were cut off from the very source of love and life in their world.*

*In healing the leper Jesus breaks the rules of the community by touching an unclean person. In reality Jesus demonstrates that the leper was not an unclean person. He, like everyone, is worth Jesus' time, compassion, and forgiving touch. All he had to do was ask, and Jesus responded. Once healed, Jesus sent the man to the priest to be restored to the community!*

*We can learn some basic lessons from all this. First and foremost, all people are worth our time and care. As imitators of Christ we are required to reach out not only to the poor and sick, but also to the ostracized, the alienated, and the condemned. Secondly, we must appreciate that being a part of a community is a great gift. We are not called to be individuals with faith in Christ; we are called to be people of God, united in one Church, praising God in community.*

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