

## Commentary for the 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time B



### Gospel Summary

This passage continues the narrative of Jesus' mission immediately following his baptism in the Jordan and the call of the first disciples. As beloved Son and Messiah, his mission is to proclaim the good news of the coming of God's kingdom. God's rule over all creation would bring to an end the domination of Satan, characterized by all forms of untruth, violence, sickness and death. That the power of God's rule is present in Jesus becomes evident to the amazement of the people by his teaching with authority, his healing and his casting out demons.

This Sunday's gospel tells us of Jesus' cure of a man afflicted with leprosy (a term referring to any repulsive skin disease). A leper comes to Jesus and begs to be cured. Moved with compassion, Jesus touches the "untouchable" and cures him. He then sends him to a priest so that he can be reinstated into the community.

After curing the leper, Jesus had admonished him not to publicize what had happened. Mark here anticipates a major theme he will develop more explicitly in his gospel: namely, that people, even Peter and the rest of his disciples, will misunderstand Jesus' mission. The theme reflects an aspect of Satan's attempt to entice Jesus to redefine his mission solely to the satisfaction of people's temporal needs, and thereby to become the messiah of his own earthly, political kingdom. The kingdom of Satan would remain essentially intact had Jesus succumbed to that temptation. John's gospel also alludes to Jesus' concern about the mistaken notion people had of his mission: "Since Jesus knew that they were going

to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone...you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled" (6:15-26).

Jesus, however, is faithful to his Father's will to the end. Filled with divine compassion, he responds to the temporal needs of people for healing and for food; but ultimately he wants to give the gift of eternal life with God, the only gift that will satisfy the restlessness and the hunger of the human heart.

## **Life Implications**

Since the Church is the means by which Christ extends his mission for the sake of God's kingdom through history, healing will be an essential characteristic of its service. Christians, through the urging of Christ's compassion, must bring healing to the world's sickness, making possible medical care even for the "untouchables" of our own society. In the Catholic tradition, Christ's compassionate hand touches the sick in a special way through the sacrament of anointing. The Church like Christ will be tempted to reduce the meaning of God's kingdom to the relief of people's obvious and pressing temporal needs. Christ's compassion, however, continues to extend beyond these needs to the deepest human need for personal transformation through communion in eternal, divine life. We can see how Christ's compassionate hand touches the sick in both aspects in the prayers appointed for the administration of the sacrament of anointing.

Like Jesus each of us will endure a trial of faith when beset by suffering and approaching death. Am I really God's beloved daughter? Am I really God's beloved son? Is it death that defines the meaning of human existence? The source of our hope is that we share Christ's own unconquerable hope through the gift of his Spirit. Jesus prayed to be delivered from suffering and death; nevertheless, as things worked out, he trusted in God's love through the experience of his suffering, abandonment, and dying. In our time of trial, as the Letter to the Hebrews tells, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. "For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12-2)

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