

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jan 24th 2019

Memorial of Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

We live in a society that tends to dismiss the sick and the poor. We are told that because sick people can spread germs, we should avoid them: “Stay clear of anyone coughing with a runny nose or you’ll get sick too.” We are told that the poor are poor because of some deficiency, usually a moral deficiency: “If they weren’t so lazy, then they wouldn’t be so poor!” Society encourages us to isolate ourselves from the sick and poor – to make ourselves inaccessible to them. In such a culture, the sick and poor begin to feel unwanted and unloved.

So it’s refreshing to see Jesus walk among the sick and poor in today’s Gospel. It’s refreshing to see how many people flock to see him and to receive his healing, love and grace. They came from all over Judea. And Jesus doesn’t avoid them. He mingles with them, allowing himself to be touched and so healing them: “those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him.” In short, he makes himself accessible so they can know the Good News of God’s love for them. In this way, Jesus serves as God’s intercessor: “Jesus is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them.”

As Christians, we too are called to bring others to God and to share the Good News of God’s love for everyone. St. Francis de Sales provides an excellent example of how to share this Good News. Born in 1567, St. Francis confronted the religious divisions occurring at the time with gentleness and compassion. His famous book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, was unusual because it was addressed to laypeople. He believed that the pursuit of holiness was possible for each and every Christian, regardless of their vocation or state in life. In other words, St. Francis made God accessible to everyone.

St. Francis emphasized charity over penance, reminding us that God’s goodness is beyond our imagination. No one can outdo God in goodness: “Since the goodness of God is so great

that one single moment suffices to obtain and receive God’s grace, what assurance can we have that a person who was a sinner yesterday is a sinner today?” (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, part III, chapter 29).

How can we make God more “accessible” to others? How can we make ourselves more accessible to the sick and poor around us?

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