

Reflections on 6th Sunday of the Year 24B.

Mass: Leviticus 13:1-2,44-46; Psalm: 31; 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1; Mark 1:40-45.

Experts tell us that leprosy was actually unlikely to be around at the time of Jesus. It was also not highly contagious. What people were afraid of was basically the unknown. A very reasonable fear in those days when so little was known scientifically. Nevertheless, it would have terrible consequences for people who were different. To be different was dangerous and therefore an offence against the community. Sin was largely a corporate thing that effected the community in some way. It was not really internalised except insofar as it effected relationships with others. Hence, 'lepers' or people with skin conditions were sinners by definition. Jesus not only responds to this man but also touches him. According to our translation this means that he cannot now associate with the community, he has to meet people in the open. This reference may be because he has broken the exclusion rules or simply a reference to the Exodus story once more. Jesus is forming a new people in the desert from among the excluded. However, once again Jesus is intimate in a way not accepted by his culture and religion. This is a constant challenge from Jesus. The most famous is, of course, the Mary who anoints his feet and wipes it with her hair. This intimacy, this willingness to reach out and touch is characteristic of Jesus again and again. It will lead to the intimacy of a terrible death, excluded and exposed. In our tidy and antiseptic world this is a challenge to us. To be intimate is to be messy, back to the 'down and dirty', or 'smell of the sheep'.