



Homily – World Marriage Day / 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)ⁱ

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Los Angeles, California
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today we celebrate the World Marriage Day organized by the Worldwide Marriage Encounter. It is a day when we specially pray for the institution of Marriage and honors the vocation of husband and wife. We specially recognize couples who celebrate their anniversaries.

As I said recently, Marriage, in every culture and every age, has been recognized as the lifelong union of a man and woman for their own well-being and for the creation and nurturing of children. Marriage is the foundation of society.

The times that we are living demand from us to proclaim the dignity of the human person, the sacredness of the institution of Marriage and the blessing of the family.

As Pope Benedict XVI said: “In the Holy Family of Nazareth we are given the true model of a Christian home. Let us resolve to make our own homes radiate with Christ’s loving harmony and peace.”

“The Church considers serving the family to be one of her essential duties. In this sense both man and the family constitute "the way of the Church." Pope John Paul II, letter to families, 2.

In the Gospel passage we have just heard, St. Mark is once again this week telling us about a miraculous healing from the early days of Jesus’ public ministry.

Jesus healing the leper is another sign of his love and his compassion for the sick. It was also another proof of his divinity and power — because of course only God has the power to cleanse lepers. ⁱⁱ

As we heard in our first reading from the Book of Leviticus, under the Old Testament people thought leprosy was extremely contagious and could not be cured. They also thought leprosy meant people were being punished for some serious sins they had committed.

So in those days, having leprosy made a person spiritually “unclean.” That meant, as we heard, that the leper was exiled and was not allowed to worship with the rest of the community.

Today, of course, we know better. We know that we are all sinners. We know that physical sickness has physical causes. We know that God does not punish sinners by giving them diseases.

And that is what Jesus shows us in today’s Gospel.

The leper that we meet in the Gospel is more than a historical character in the life of Jesus. He is also a symbol. This man with leprosy represents the human race before God. He represents each one of us.

Sin is what separates us from God. Sin is the real obstacle in our lives. It is our sin that makes us “unclean” before God.

So our Gospel today is reminding us we are all “lepers,” in a manner of speaking. Because we are all sinners. We know this about ourselves. We know that we sin and we fall short of what God expects. If we say we are without sin, we know we are just fooling ourselves.ⁱⁱⁱ

The good news of our Gospel today is that in Jesus we can be forgiven of our sins. In Jesus we find the cure for our “leprosy,” the cure for our separation from God.

My brothers and sisters, what Jesus does for this leper today, he does for each one of us!

Jesus comes into each one of our lives. He stretches out his hand to us. He touches each one of us with his compassion and forgiveness. By his touch and by his Word, Jesus wants to make us clean. He wants to give us a new life.

So this is the beautiful message of our readings today. Jesus takes away the guilt of our sins! He gives us the great gift of God’s forgiveness. He calls us to holiness.^{iv}

So today, in the presence of God, we have to ask ourselves — what symptoms of sin do we recognize in our lives? Maybe we find little things — problems of pride, selfishness, laziness, jealousy, lack of patience, intolerance. What do we see in our life that keeps us from real friendship with Jesus?

Then, we can turn to him. We can come to him often in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Like the leper in today’s Gospel, we can come to Jesus on our knees and ask him to make us clean, to heal the spiritual illness in our lives.

The man with leprosy gives us a good example. He just talks to Jesus, honestly and simply. He tells Jesus: “If you will, you can make me clean!”

This is such a beautiful prayer! He is not asking for *his will* to be done. He is asking for *God's will* to be done. "If *You will, You can* make me clean."

And of course, that *is* God's will — not only for him, but also for each one of us.

Jesus wants to cleanse us of our sins often in his beautiful Sacrament of Reconciliation. He wants each of us to hear the beautiful words that he says to the leper today: "*I do will it. Be made clean.*" And immediately, through the ministry of the priest in this sacrament, he makes us clean.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus wants us to know the great joy of his salvation. He wants us to know what that leper felt when his sins were forgiven. He could not keep his joy to himself! He was so grateful to Jesus that he went off and proclaimed what happened to everyone. So much so that Jesus couldn't go into the towns because everyone wanted to see him.

And of course, that is also a lesson for us. We need to be joyful disciples! We need to always be sharing with others our love for Jesus. Telling others about his teachings. About his forgiveness and healing.

If we do it, then we can also understand the importance of forgiving one another. Forgiveness may be the most important family virtue.

Living so close to each other naturally gives rise to many situations where it is likely that someone is going to offend someone else.

The health of our family often depends on how we deal with these situations. If we allow them to go on and on, doing nothing about bringing forgiveness to the situation, then it is like allowing fruit to sit on the kitchen table and go rotten as we look on.

And let's try to grow in the faith of that poor leper. We can pray his words often: "*If you will, you can make me clean.*" And let's also try to get to the Sacrament of Reconciliation more frequently, so we can hear those beautiful words of Jesus: "*I do will it. Be made clean.*"

I ask Mary, our Blessed Mother, the refugee of sinners, and the Mother of our Hope, to pray for us and to help us grow in our imitation of Christ and our desire for his forgiveness.

ⁱ Readings: Lev. 13:1–2, 44–46; Ps. 32:1–2, 5, 11; 1 Cor. 10:13–11:1; Mark 1:40–45.

ⁱⁱ Matt. 11:5; Luke 7:22.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8.

^{iv} 1 Thess. 4:7.