

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: February 14, 2021

St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore

A Reflection on the Gospel (Mark 1:40-45)

While preparing to write this reflection, I must have read, re-read, read about, studied, reflected on, or prayed about this passage for probably 99 times. I would get valuable insights into various parts of it, but nothing overall and cohesive. Then, today, perhaps the 100th time, it suddenly seemed clear: this whole passage is a series of acknowledgements.

The leper assumes the posture of a supplicant, kneeling before Jesus, thereby acknowledging Jesus' superior position, his own begging for mercy, and Jesus' power to heal him. He recognizes that Jesus also has the power of choice.

Jesus acknowledges the man's humanity by touching him—the outcast and lonely, the unclean, untouchable one—and responding directly to the man without hesitation. Jesus also acknowledges his own power to choose, and he chooses healing.

Jesus acknowledges the established method of restoring the man to full participation in his society: show himself to the priest and make the required offerings. In spite of the significant social and religious benefits of that offering, we don't know whether he did that or not: we can only speculate.

The former leper acknowledges his healing and his joy in his new life by spreading the good news, by proclaiming the healing power of Jesus. He was so effective that people responded by seeking Jesus everywhere he went. Perhaps they were also acknowledging their belief in and their hope for the healing power of Jesus.

This Scripture passage seems highly relevant today. We are in a society desperately in need of healing. We are divided politically, with some people bitterly opposed to any form of negotiation or reconciliation. Our country is deeply wounded by the past and current abuses of racism, denying a large part of our population their full and open participation in all aspects of our society. Large numbers of people in our country and around the world suffer because of economic inequity. The whole world needs healing from all the various aspects of the COVID pandemic. Our planet is in need of healing because of our misuse of our resources. Are we able as a society to acknowledge our part, personal or inherited, our need to heal, our need for God's healing actions in the world?

In what ways are we like the leper, both before and after his healing?

As followers of Jesus the Christ, what do we need to acknowledge?

What do we need to do about it?

Peggy Shouse