Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lv 13:1-2, 44-46; 1 Cor 10:13-11:1; Mk 1:40-45
Homilist: *Sister Carolyn McCormack, OP*

"If you want to, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him and said to him, "I do want to. Be made clean".

All the stories we have ever heard of leprosy carry such horrific images. Not only does the leper suffer the disease that consistently eats away his healthy life, but he is singled out, set apart, excluded from the community and shunned by all. It is this exclusion that is the most painful factor of the illness. Perhaps that is why the action of Jesus, compassionate and merciful healer that he is, who immediately cures the leper, captures our heart. In today's gospel, Jesus reveals his power to restore us, to draw us in, to include us. Here we come face to face with the reality that in Jesus, God's suffering servant, the Father's saving, merciful love is available to each and every one of us.

Deeper reflection draws us to other insights. One cannot help but recognize the contraction in today's readings ---first the reading from Leviticus with clear directions to Aaron and Moses that the lepers are to be set apart, excluded from the community and then, the gospel of Mark who presents a story of Jesus who reverses the law and heals the leper, creating an opportunity of inclusion for him. Jesus gives him a direction, "See that you tell no one anything, but go and show yourself to the priest." Unable to keep quiet, the healed leper does exactly the opposite and suddenly Jesus is the one who is excluded—unable "to enter the town openly. He remained outside in deserted places and people kept coming to him from everywhere". Suddenly, the leper is moving about freely while Jesus lingers on the edge, outside, in those deserted places, going about the Father's work. Contradictions abound and questions, too.

There are no simple explanations for these powerful encounters with Jesus or the consequences that follow them. Are we willing to be surprised at where the power of God will reveal itself among us? Can we be mindful of the contradictions in our own lives and move through them with mercy and love? Can we believe in the power of the Spirit at work in us as we move with mercy and compassion among the needy of our times? Will we allow ourselves to believe that that same Spirit, at work among us, can restore and bring us to full inclusion?

Paul provides a thought for us as we grapple with the mystery of today's readings. He tells us, clearly, "whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God". As disciples of Jesus, with our hearts set on his example of merciful love, we, too, can go about spreading the good news, sharing this powerful message of inclusion and celebrating the power of the Spirit at work---all for the glory of God!