

## Bishop's reflection – 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday

My hat goes off to all our front-line health care workers. They've done an amazing job under very difficult conditions. But my hat also goes off to many others, including those who commute to other Provinces for work. They've had to endure some of the greatest sacrifices, not only by leaving their families and communities for long stretches of time, but for having to self-isolate each time they come back. The fact that we've had so few cases, for so long, shows how their periods of self-quarantine have made a real difference.

Now take it one step further; the lepers of Jesus' day had to endure a quarantine for the rest of their lives and, in doing so, died without family and friends to surround them. From the moment they were diagnosed, their fate was sealed. It wasn't uncommon for families to celebrate their funerals the day they were cast out of the community.

Three short years ago, when we last heard this Gospel, we could not begin to imagine the desperation of the leper in today's Gospel passage. After ten months in pandemic mode, and multiple stories of forced quarantine – many of us with our own personal experiences, the leper's actions and words seem more relevant and strident: kneeling... begging... crying out: "If you choose, you can make me clean." So, too, the response of Christ, who is not indifferent to the leper's plea. "Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" And, at his word, the man was made clean, the leprosy left him.

Notice how Jesus touched the leper. This, in itself, was forbidden on the pains of becoming infected yourself, much like our COVID-19 restrictions, whereby touching people and things have become issues of grave concern. Keep you distance, if at all possible, we are told, and wear a mask. Jesus actions seem as contrary to us as they did back then.

What are we to make of it? Should we throw all our precautions to the wind? Not at all. But let us at least realize that we need to be more mindful of one another, especially those who may be having a difficult time with all the restrictions placed on them. For ten months we've been asked to live with fear and uncertainty, and we are only about half-way through. We need to recognize the signs of fatigue in others and in ourselves, if we are going to have a truly Christian response to the needs of the present crisis and the needs of those around us.

Who are the ones who are crying out for human touch, and how can we touch them in a meaningful way? If physical touch is necessary, how can we do it safely, so as to protect everyone concerned? Without becoming reckless, while avoiding to seem aloof, Christians are called to become more engaged with the needs of the world, the pains, hurts and cries that so often go unheard.

Let us return to Christ for a moment. Notice how his actions have a direct impact on his life moving forward. As the Gospel relates, "Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to Jesus from every quarter." In essence, Jesus traded places with the leper, as he does for all humanity on the cross.