

Knights Lecture 11

The Gospel and the first reading for Mass today are direct contradictions of each other. The first reading describes the portion of the Law of Moses in which the Lord says to Moses and Aaron, “If someone has on his skin a scab or postule or blotch which appears to be the sore of leprosy, he shall be brought to Aaron, the priest... The priest shall declare him unclean by reason of the sore on his head. He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp.” In the Gospel a leprous man is brought to Jesus asking to be cured of his disease so that he could be cleansed by the temple priests. As you know leprosy is not a disease that has any known cure.

Something that comes to mind when I hear these readings together is the story of Fr. Damien of Malachi, Malachi, where he carried out his ministry, was part of one of the Hawaiian islands which had been quarantined for leprosy. The leprosy all of these people had contracted had caused the government in Hawaii to literally shut these people out from the rest of society. Fr. Damien saw that in addition to these people being shut out of society they did not have anyone to minister to their spiritual needs. In 1889, after caring for these people for 23 years, and contracting leprosy himself, he died. In 2009 he was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI.

Yesterday, in addition to it being Valentine’s Day, Pope Francis elevated 20 men to the status of cardinal. In his remarks during the consistory Pope Francis said, “The greater our responsibility in serving the Church, the more our hearts must expand according to the measure of the heart of Christ.” The heart of the same Christ who suffered enormous pain for our salvation. Christ’s suffering and death is the most perfect example of charity in the history of the world. I’ll echo again St. Catherine who said that in order to fix the mental harm that sin causes you must counter it with virtue, which she says, are all rooted in patience and charity. Pope Francis reaffirmed this when said, “Christians should be persons always ready to forgive; always ready to trust, because we are full of faith in God; always ready to inspire hope, because we ourselves are full of hope in God; persons ready to bear patiently every situation and each of our brothers and sisters, in union with Christ who bore with love the burden of our sins.”¹

¹ <http://www.catholicerald.co.uk/news/2015/02/14/always-be-ready-to-forgive-pope-francis-urges-new-cardinals/>

As we prepare to begin our journey through lent this Wednesday let us remember the charity of the St. Damien who's charity led him to care for the spiritual as well as the temporal needs of the Lepers of Malachi; St. Damien did this because he was responding the call we all have, as Christians, to forgive, trust, be patient, and inspire hope.