

6B

They say that one of the principal reasons why Aids has spread so rapidly in certain countries is because the people generally are in denial about it. For them it is a taboo subject, they pass it off their as another illness to avoid the shame of having to tell their families.

Perhaps there could be a connection between that and what was happening to lepers in our Lord's Day. Being considered unclean they had to live apart from the general population. Out of sight meant out of mind. Do we ever treat as lepers those whom society tends to disown?

Being unclean, however, doesn't just refer to the physical body but also to the person. We can be stained with what we might call the leprosy of sin. As we heard last Sunday, Jesus came primarily to cleanse us of that. As with leprosy, a lot of people can be in denial about their darker side, so they don't have to confront it. If we don't call a sin by its proper name and take responsibility for it, the chances are we'll never be rid of it.

Lepers were isolated from the general population. Sin also has that effect on us. We feel ill at ease with God, with ourselves and with others. Like Adam and Eve who hid after they ate the forbidden fruit, we too want to go and hide from Him or live as if He didn't exist. I have the feeling that when people say they don't believe in God, what they're really doing is running away from God, like Adam and Eve did. But God is not the same with us since no one is 'outside the pale' of His love. Like the leper in today's story, we can confidently step out in faith and plead with the Lord for healing. He always listens to heartfelt prayer.

Jesus told the leper to go and show himself to the priest. Perhaps there is a foreshadowing here of the Sacrament of

Penance where people go to be cleansed of their sins by confessing them to a priest and receiving absolution. The priest here represents Christ, the physician of our souls.

Another thing about lepers is that their skin becomes desensitized when exposed to extreme pain. For instance, it's very distressing to see a leper hold a red hot poker which is literally melting his fingers and yet he feels nothing. So pain, and that includes emotional, has a purpose – it's the flashing light to tell me that we are not functioning as we should.

But the same is true of spiritual breakdown. We can become numb to sin and oblivious to the pain we are causing others, especially those nearest and dearest to us. Lent us just around the corner and that is a prime time for facing up to these issues.

In his passion, which we'll soon commemorate, Jesus, took the leprosy of sin on Himself. By so doing he opened the floodgates of forgiveness and healing for all who believe in Him.