

Homily 6B

They say that one of the principal reasons why Aids has spread so rapidly in some parts of the developing world is because generally speaking people were in denial about it. A lot of victims, out of shame, would pass off their illness as something else.

Perhaps there could be a connection between that and what was happening to lepers in our Lord's Day. They had to live apart from the general population because they were considered unclean. Out of sight meant out of mind for the majority of people.

Being unclean, however, doesn't just refer to the body but also to the soul of a person. We could call it the leprosy of sin. Just like with Aids, we may not be up-front about sin, so we don't have to deal with it. If we don't call a sin by its proper name and take responsibility for it, chances are we'll never be cleansed of it.

Lepers were quarantined from the general population. Sin can have that effect on us. We feel out of sorts with ourselves and others. Like Adam and Eve after they sinned, we want to go and hide from God or live as if He didn't exist.

Jesus told the lepers to go and show themselves to the priests. Perhaps there is a foreshadowing here of the Sacrament of Penance where people go and confess to a priest if they are affected in a serious way by the leprosy of sin. A generic confession and absolution is fine for small sins but for serious ones we need a one to one with the priest so that he can get a fuller picture of our situation and offer suitable counsel. They say you should never lie to your doctor. The physician of your

souls is in the same boat. He can't help you if you're not up front with him or dodging private confession altogether.

Another thing about lepers is that their skin become desensitized when exposed to extreme pain. For instance they say it's very distressing to see a leper hold a red hot poker which is burning his fingers yet he feels nothing. We can thank God for pain whether it be physical or mental or emotional – it's the flashing light to tell me there is something not quite right.

The same is true of spiritual malfunction. We can become numb to sin. We can be stuck in a rut and unaware of the misery we may be causing others. Sin becomes a way of life which we can so easily justify. There is some hope, if my conscience, like a flashing light, spurs me on into action. But when my conscience is in cold storage and doesn't bother me at all, then the leprosy of sin has really taken hold.

But, as with the leper in today's gospel, Jesus is only waiting to be asked so that he can be more than generous with his mercy. If we play our part He will certainly not disappoint us.