

Homily 6B

They say that one of the principal reasons why Aids 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 often meant out of mind for the families of these unfortunate 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 head on. If we don't call it by its proper name and take responsibility for it, chances are we'll never be cleansed of it. Jesu told those who conspired against him that they 'would die in their sins' if they remained obstinate. We don't want that to happen to us.

Lepers were quarantined from the general population – a bit like in the recent pandemic when people had to shield even from their loved ones to avoid contamination. But sin also can have that effect on us. Like Adam and Eve we want to go and shield 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 an allusion here to the Sacrament of Penance where people go and confess to a priest if they are affected in a serious way by the deadly contagion of sin. A generic confession and absolution is fine for small sins but for grave ones we need to have a one to one with the confessor. It

would be foolish to withhold relevant information from your doctor regarding your health. The physician of your souls is in the same boat. He can't help you if you're hiding things from him. When confronted by God after eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve blamed each other, not themselves. A bit like in Gaza – no one has taken responsibility for all the deaths of mostly innocent people.

Another thing about lepers is that their skin become desensitized when exposed to extreme pain. For instance if they plunge their hand into a bucket of boiling water they feel no pain.

The same is true of spiritual malfunction. We can become desensitized to evil. We can be stuck in a rut and be 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 the soul has really taken hold and can be deadly.

But, as with the leper in today's gospel who pleaded on his knees, Jesus is only too happy to cure us from the spiritual leprosy if we earnestly desire it. The choice is over to us.