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## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time - 11 February 2024

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# 11 February 2024

## Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Gerard Moore

### Introduction

We are invited by Paul to be imitators of Christ. Our Gospel reveals Jesus' willingness to heal lepers, touching the unclean and restoring them to the community and their families. The evangelist gives us a glimpse of Jesus removed from the towns so he can have space to heal the sick and treat the despondent. It is a challenge to us and our Church, calling us to service beyond limits.

### Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you suffered so that we might be transformed through your grace. Lord have mercy.

You came that we might be filled with the joy of salvation. Christ have mercy.

You came to touch us and heal us. Lord have mercy.

### Collect

*The oration*

O God, who teach us that you abide

in hearts that are just and true,

grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace

as to become a dwelling pleasing to you.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever.

It is not too surprising to find that our prayer first served as a collect for the feast of the Ascension. This original setting brings to the fore the deep biblical resonances that are at the core of the oration. The use of 'abide' is a clear reference back to the Gospel of John (Jn 6:57, Jn 15:5-7), and expresses God's promise to remain in the heart of believers. Abiding in God's love involves keeping the commandments, inclusive of sharing with the poor: *but if anyone has the world's goods and sees a*

*brother or sister in need, how does God's love abide in that person* (1 Jn 3:17). The language of God's indwelling is taken from St Paul. It designates Christ's presence by faith (Eph 3:17), the presence of the Spirit (Rom 8:8-9), the presence of Christ's word (Col 3:11) and power (2 Cor 12:9). By contrast, without Christ, sin dwells in the inner depths of the human person (Rom 7:17-19). Rather, the people in whom God abides are characterized by hearts that are just and true. Yet their right deeds are only in harmony with God's will on account of the fashioning of divine grace. The prayer exemplifies the community's faith in the power of God's word, which teaches that God will abide and brings this about.

### **Acknowledgement**

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

## **First Reading**

### **Leviticus 13:1–2, 44–46**

The Lord empowers the leaders to preserve the health and wellbeing of the community in place of incurable suffering.

## **Responsorial Psalm**

### **Psalm 31:1-2, 5, 11. R. v. 5**

*I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.*

This psalm delights in the healing that comes about through forgiveness.

## **Second Reading**

### **1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1**

There can be no clearer mandate in Paul than to imitate Christ.

## **Gospel Reading**

### **Mark 1:40–45**

The compassion of Jesus goes beyond the strictures of the law, bringing restoration to the outcasts.

## **Reflection**

Our first reading sits as prelude to the Gospel. The Leviticus text is about the protection of the people from a vicious disease, which had no cure and was contagious. The declarations of clean and unclean belong to the priests, who are following divine instructions transmitted through Moses. There are a couple of things to observe here. The instructions around leprosy are from the Lord. These are God's

people and their protection is divine protection. Moses is the greatest of the leaders, the prophet and mouthpiece of God, and Aaron is his brother. The instructions, then, have the strongest authority.

The text concentrates on the protection of the people, not on the curing of the individual. We see nothing from the side of the afflicted. It is worth noting that very little actually changed in the treatment of this disease till modern times. The memory of St Damien of Moloki is still fresh in our midst, as are treatments of victims of this disease in Australia. How the sufferers and their families felt and the plight of families deprived of a breadwinner or wife and mother is unrecorded. This makes it a difficult text for us to grasp given our different context. Yet the law was created to keep the people safe, and given religious significance with its divine blessing, authoritative law maker in Moses, and the pronouncement of being 'unclean'.

This allows us to enter into the power of the Gospel. Jesus touches the untouchable. He puts an end to an agonizing, slow death, isolation from the community, rejection by the family. He also puts an end to any sense that the illness was related to sin. Jesus' cure is unconditional and full.

However, Jesus' actions are also fraught. In touching the man, Jesus becomes 'unclean'. He is bringing a new 'law', one of love, compassion and power that will not be contained in the face of suffering. Yet in instructing the newly cured, Jesus calls on him to abide by the law, show himself to the priests, and be declared 'clean'. Through this the person who was once a leper is able to re-enter society and be accepted. Jesus understand the law is important, but that there are greater things which should not be stifled by it.

The ending of the Gospel is typically Markan. Jesus does not want to be revealed just yet: the full story has not unfolded. Yet the man is bound to go public, to the priests, to his family, to the community. All have a stake in knowing his condition. He also is exuberant. Jesus' response is not to avoid his role but to manage it. He takes up residence in places a bit removed from the towns, but still close enough for the sick to visit him. In a way the desert is no longer hostile. The healing ministry continues.

As Mark will deliver a number of healing miracles it is worth pondering the radical nature of Jesus as healer. He understands the law, abides by it, but is not limited to it. Here he breaks one given by the Lord, pronounced by Moses and carried through by Aaron! His ministry is one of compassion, and is freely given. He earns nothing from his gifts. There is no grift here. He is committed firmly to the outcasts and those in great need. The people flock to him, finding comfort and compassion. This is a platform for our community today to ask where the outcasts are, who is in need of comfort and compassion, who is sundered from family and community. For Mark that is where the church should be. We have a Lord who excels in healing, do we have a church that does the same. As Paul asks, how can we be imitators of Christ?

# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

God empowers people to be healers and so let us turn to God with all the needs of those suffering and in despair in our world.

## Petitions

We pray for Pope Francis and the leaders of our Church that they will be like Jesus and follow the Law but also go beyond it to restore those who are outcast.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the economic and political leaders in our world that they will learn that the most important factor in all decisions is the people, not power or money.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who are outcast and suffering, especially in war torn areas of the world. May they be supported and healed by those who can reach them. May we all offer our support financially and in spirit and prayer.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those in contemplative life that their prayer be a powerhouse for those who work to spread the gospel.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all of us gathered here that we will grow in our understanding of how love and compassion can heal those who are suffering in any way.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are stricken with grief. May their journey be eased by gentle and compassionate companionship.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

## Conclusion

God of salvation, you fill us with joy and the knowledge that our prayers will be answered. We make our prayer through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus, our Lord.

**Amen.**

## Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
All creatures of our God and king				618	446	395
Amazing grace	29				450	437
Eye has not seen	146					466
For the journey			128			
Heal me, O God		52				
Lift up your hearts to the Lord					539	416
Lord whose love in humble service				741	551	
O Christ, the healer, we have come				759	127	
Praise, my soul, the king of Heaven	78			789	588	
Shelter me, O God	140					
The Church of Christ, in every age				818	613	
The summons					645	502
Trust in God, hope in God					128	
Turn our sadness upside down			125			
Your hands, O Lord, in days of old					129	

Title	S&S1
Lift up your hearts	126
The summons	137

## Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 31: *I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.*

	CWB	JOB	LPB
Psalm 31	365	pg. 56	pg. 101

## Music selections by Michael Mangan

Heaven shall be yours (TCS) *Beatitudes* [Communion]