

Closing Prayer

We come before you, O God,
confident in Christ's victory over sickness and death.

Heal us again
from sin, which divides us,
and from prejudice, which isolates us.
Bring us to wholeness of life
through the pardon you grant your people.

We ask this 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.

Opening prayers · Ordinary Time 6, Year B³

Proper 2

*Sunday between 11 and 17 February inclusive, if earlier than
the Second Sunday before Lent · Sixth Sunday in Ordinary
Time*

Principal Service readings

2 Kings 5.1-14

Naaman the leper is healed

Psalm 30

I will exalt God because he has lifted me up

1 Corinthians 9.24-27

Paul, like an athlete in training, running to win the prize

Mark 1.40-45

Jesus heals the leper but has to stay away from town

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Healing the leper

⁴⁰A leper came to Jesus begging him, and kneeling he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' ⁴¹Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' ⁴²Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. ⁴³After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, ⁴⁴saying to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' ⁴⁵But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

Mark 1.40-45 NRSV¹

³ *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

Jesus teaches in the synagogue (1.21), but he also encounters people outside, including this leper, excluded from normal society. Lepers were also considered as sinners (see Numbers 12.10-5; cf. Deuteronomy 28.27, 35; 2 Kings 5.25-27; 2 Chronicles 26.16-21), perhaps similar to how AIDS sufferers are considered today. The term 'leprosy' (from the Greek *leptein*, 'peel off') is probably not what we call leprosy today (Hansen's disease) but refers to a wide variety of skin disorders.

Despite his social exclusion, the leper has the confidence to approach Jesus: 'If you choose, you can make me clean' (1.40). Jesus does so choose. He has compassion on the man and reaches out to heal him, at a risk to his own health (1.41), but the actual healing is effected by Jesus' words. Physical contact with such people would make a person 'unclean' too. Perhaps we would not so readily involve ourselves in such a situation.

Jesus sends the man away, to prove his healing to a priest (as specified in Leviticus 13.47-14.54). The man, however, wants to tell everyone about his healing and so causes Jesus to evade the crowds and seek a deserted place. Although people still sought him out. This is another example of Mark's theme of 'Messianic Secret', where people are asked to keep quiet about Jesus.

The Messianic Secret theory was proposed by William Wrede in 1901. He decided the injunction to keep quiet couldn't have come from Jesus because it was unreasonable to expect people to keep quiet and thus a historical Jesus couldn't have made the command. Observing that the secrecy theme occurs primarily in Mark, he hypothesized that the passages were written to explain why Jesus had not been recognised as the Messiah during his life. (The lead to explain this was based on the supposition that the earliest belief in Jesus' Messiahship began after his death.) Although Wrede's paper was a landmark in Biblical scholarship (the translated name of the paper gives us the 'Messianic secret' name by which the passage are still described in scholarship), the ideas were attacked as soon as they came out. The idea gained currency in the 1920s, but has steadily fallen out of favour among Biblical scholars since then. By the 1970s, the theory was essentially dead, as it raised many

more problems than it solved. In the words of G. E. Ladd, it 'is a clever theory, but utterly lacking in evidence'.²

Quotations

1

As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways in which I could respond to my situation -- either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course.

Martin Luther King Jr., 1929–1968

2

I suppose that since most of our hurts come through relationships so will our healing, and I know that grace rarely makes sense for those looking in from the outside.

The Shack / William Paul Young. 2007

Related topics

For further study:

Healing; God's love; Jesus Christ; social justice; kingdom of God; dignity of the human person; grace; signs of the kingdom of God; miracles; sign of touch; laying on of hands; sacraments of anointing of the sick and reconciliation; the Law

² *A theology of the New Testament* / by George Eldon Ladd. – 1957.