

CLOSING PRAYER:

~ A Prayer to Begin Lent ~

God, heavenly Father,
look upon me and hear my prayer
as I prepare to begin this holy Season of Lent.
By the good works you inspire,
help me to discipline my body
so as to be renewed in spirit.

Without You I can do nothing.
By Your Spirit help me to know what is right
and to be eager in doing your will.
Teach me to find new life through penance.
Keep me from sin, and help me live
by your commandment of love.
God of love, bring me back to you.
Send Your Spirit to make me strong
in faith and active in good works.
May my acts of penance bring me your forgiveness,
open my heart to your love,
and prepare me for the coming feast
of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Lord, throughout this Lenten Season,
keep me faithful to the Gospel of Jesus.
Nourish me with the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist.
Make me one with you in love and prayer.

Father, our source of life,
I reach out with joy to grasp your hand;
let me walk more readily in your ways.
Guide me in your gentle mercy,
for left to myself I cannot do your Will.

Father of love, source of all blessings,
help me to pass from my old life of sin
to the new life of grace.
May I live all my days in the glory of your Kingdom.
Amen.

CAMPUS MINISTRY OFFICE:

The Campus Ministry Office is located in **Our Lady Chapel**.
phone: [440] 473-3560 [office] or 216-570-9276 [cell].
e-mail: blazekj@gilmour.org

Our Lady Chapel



Our Lady Chapel is a Roman Catholic community founded in the love of the Father, centered in Christ, and rooted in the Holy Cross tenets of building family and embracing diversity. We are united in our journey of faith through prayer and sacrament, and we seek growth through the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in liturgy and outreach, while responding to the needs of humanity.

FAITH EDUCATION:

Our Faith Education classes meet on **Sundays from 8:45—9:45 AM**. This is followed by **Mass in Our Lady Chapel at 10 AM**. Please join us as we come together to begin our faith journey for this year by entering into prayer and worship together. If you have any questions, please contact Patty in the Chapel Office [[440-473-3560]. **Upcoming class dates: Jan 28-Feb. 4-11**. Thank you for taking care of this important responsibility.



LENTEN NOTES:

The season of Lent begins on **Wednesday, February 14th**. During this sacred time, each of us is called to spiritual growth — particularly through a turning away from sin. Lent is a time for “new beginnings” — a time to grow in our relationship with God and each other. There are 3 major spiritual practices during Lent to which Scripture calls us: **prayer, fasting, and almsgiving**.

—ASH WEDNESDAY:

Wednesday, February 14th. Mass schedule for **Wednesday** will be as follows:

- 9:30 AM [Lower School]
- 2:00 PM [Middle School]
- 5:30 PM [Community Mass].

Ashes will be distributed at each of these Masses; all Masses will be in the main chapel.

Please feel free to attend any of the Masses on this day which are convenient for you.

—LENTEN REGULATIONS:

Ash Wednesday and **Good Friday** are days of **fast** for all between the ages of eighteen and fifty-nine. Fasting means that one full meal for the day is allowed, along with two light meals [snacks]. No eating between meals. Those not included in these “ages” are encouraged to take upon themselves some aspects of the fast, whenever possible.

Ash Wednesday and **All Fridays** during Lent are days of **abstinence** from meat, for those who are fourteen and older. Again, those not included in these “ages” are encouraged to participate whenever possible.



LOVE:

Love is a wellspring from which we all can drink, but we may be coming to the wellspring from different paths of inspiration. I describe love as sweet labor — a fierce and bloody and imperfect life-giving choice that we make. And if love is labor, then love can be taught. Love can be modeled. Love can be practiced. What I find so invigorating is that more and more of us now are naming the practices — how to be brave with your grief, how to honor your rage, how to let go of things that are dragging you down and the little critic in your mind that’s keeping you from realizing your full self. The more we can share the good news around these practices, the more we can say: “All of us can have access to building beloved community right where we are.”

Author and civil rights activist Grace Lee Boggs (1915–2015) wrote about the power of collective commitment: “When people come together voluntarily to create their own vision, they begin wishing it to come into being with such passion that they begin creating an active path leading to it from the present. The spirit and the way to make the spirit live coalesce. Instead of seeing ourselves only as victims, we begin to see ourselves as part of the continuing struggle of human beings, not only to survive but to evolve into more human human beings.”

If we can create and nurture and inspire more and more of those containers, every school, every home, every workplace, every church, every house of worship, every neighborhood can become a pocket of that kind of beloved community, because this love stuff is not saintly — it’s practical and pragmatic.

—Valarie Kaur

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS:

- For an end to the war between Israel and Hamas.
- For an end to the war between Russia and Ukraine.
- For an end to violence as a means to resolve differences.
- For an end to sexual abuse and lack of respect for human persons.
- For a greater respect for human life, from the moment of conception until natural death.
- For all caregivers.
- For all service men and women serving our country, and for their families.
- For a greater awareness of our call to create a more humane and just society.

PRAYERS FOR THE DECEASED:

- For Brian McDonald, brother of Mark McDonald [’09]
- For Sister Mary Ann Lavelle, C.S.J., sister of Brother Robert Lavelle, C.S.C.
- For Father Jerry Duke, pastor-emeritus of St. Cyril and Methodius Parish
- For Koby Looman.
- For Father Frank Quinlivan, C.S.C.
- For Father Bob Brennan, C.S.C.
- For Father Frederick Serraino, C.S.C.
- For Donald Plavac
- For Lavelle Pascol, a student at St. Francis school in Cleveland, who died as a result of brain cancer.
- For Larry Chernauskas, former Girl’s Basketball Coach.
- For Ella Louise Jones, mother of Basketball Coach, Randolph Keller.

ATTENDANCE:

If you attend Mass regularly here at Our Lady Chapel, it would be helpful if you filled out a Registration Form [name, address, phone number, children, etc.] indicating this fact, if you have not already done so. Such information not only helps us to know who is attending Our Lady Chapel; it also is of great assistance to us in record keeping [for our friend, the IRS] of any contributions which you may make.

ENVELOPES:

- When you need a **new supply** of envelopes, please feel free to take a supply of them from the table in the vestibule, or call Father John at the Campus Ministry Office [473-3560].
- When you **use** your envelope, please make sure that **your number** is on it. If you need to know your number, please call the Campus Ministry Office. Thanks.

WEEKLY OFFERING:

Baskets are located on the pillars just inside the center door when you enter the chapel. Please place your offering in the basket. Baskets will not be passed during the offertory time. Your offering will help offset chapel daily operating expenses. When you choose to use the envelopes, you can request a printout of your offerings for the year to submit to the IRS. God bless you.

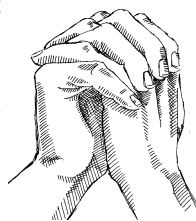
Total Offerings: Saturday [1/27/24]	-----	\$ 1,005.00
Total Offerings: Sunday [1/28/24]	-----	\$ 424.00
Total Offerings: Saturday [2/3/24]	-----	\$ 243.00
Total Offerings: Sunday [2/4/24]	-----	\$ 176.00

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Jesus calls us to pray for one another. Please keep all these people in your prayers.

PRAYERS FOR THE SICK:

- For Father Larry Jerge, C.S.C., who is under the care of Hospice.
- For John Zippay, family friend of Bernadette and Stephen Ritley, who is critically ill.
- For Jill Thompson, who is undergoing treatment for mental health issues.
- For Nora Beach, wife of former Gilmour Religion Instructor, Bob Beach, mother of Hannah [‘98] and Miriam [‘99] Beach, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Chuck Campanella, father of Anthony Campanella, who continues in rehab following serious surgery.
- For Mike Heryak, husband of Janet, father of Lillian [‘09], Rosa [‘12] and Edwin [‘17] Heryak, who is seriously ill.
- For John Roddy, brother of Tim Roddy [‘87], and brother of Gilmour Marketing associate, Mary Roddy Stretar, uncle of Katie Stretar [‘29], and cousin of Daniel [‘83], Mike [‘85], and Matt [‘86] Roddy, who is undergoing treatment for a recurrence of cancer.
- For Robert O’Neill, grandfather of Bobby O’Neill [‘33], who is undergoing treatment for bladder cancer.
- For Josephine Fernando, mother of Melvin [‘83] and Raymond [‘88] Fernando, mother-in-law of Imelda Deogracias Fernando [‘88], who is ill.
- For JoAnne Fisher, wife of Jim, mother of Bill [‘10] and PJ, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Sister Colette Livingston, O.S.U., who is recovering from surgery.
- For Pam Spicer, wife of former Gilmour coach, Bob Spicer, who is under the care of hospice.
- For Bill Stark, brother-in-law of former Gilmour teacher, Theresa Stark, who is recovering from heart by-pass surgery.
- For Sarah Lindley, Sister of Gilmour’s Social Studies Teacher, Matt Lindley [‘89], aunt of Benjamin [‘24], Nathan [‘26] and Evan [‘27] Lindley, who is recovering from surgery.
- For Judith Seiler, mother of Admissions advocate, Christian Hollis, grandmother of Tom [‘13], Nicole [‘14], Justin [‘16], John [‘18] Hollis, who is recovering from knee replacement surgery.
- For Kathy Wadowick, mother of long term sub, Sarah Soplata, who is undergoing treatment for blood clots.
- For Lincoln Nye, former Gilmour student, brother of Maddie Nye [‘25], who is undergoing medical treatment.
- For Adam Caraboolad who is recovering from kidney transplant surgery.
- For Richard DeBacco, father of Michelle Chiacchiarri [‘96], father-in-law of Mark Chiacchiarri [‘94], grandfather of Aurelia [‘28] and Olivia [‘30] Chiacchiarri, who is undergoing treatment for lymphoma
- For Marc Williams who is critically ill with ALS
- For Joe and Helen Loew who are seriously ill.
- For Shobir Corraya, brother of Brother Victor Corraya, C.S.C., who is undergoing treatment for a brain hemorrhage.
- For Frances Meyers who is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- For Michael Nestor [‘98], who is under the care of hospice.
- For Paul Serra, score keeper for Gilmour athletics, who is undergoing treatment for blood clots.



TRUE:

To convert somebody, go and take them by the hand and guide them. —St. Thomas Aquinas

NEXT BIBLE STUDY — WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28th:

Our next Virtual Bible Study will be on Wednesday, February 28th at 6:30 PM. Bible Study continues to meet bi-weekly. The Bible Study is open to everyone — all middle and high school students, college students, young adults, and all adults. We will all come together to be enriched by God’s word. It’s a great time, and a good witness of our faith to others. If you can’t come at 6:30, come when you can. Gather your favorite snack and/or drink, but be prepared to be nourished on God’s word.



Our topic: Lenten Penance

Mark your calendars and be part of this wonderful activity that will deepen your spiritual journey. We will meet every other week — topic to be decided at the end of the previous meeting. Join us. You’ll have a blast, and celebrate your faith along the way..

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Sunday, February 11: 6 th Week in Ordinary Time	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream
Monday, February 12:	NO MASS
Tuesday, February 13:	NO MASS
Wednesday, February 14: Ash Wednesday	9:30 AM [Lower School] 2:00 PM [Middle School] 5:30 PM [Community]
Thursday, February 15	NO MASS
Friday, February 16:	NO MASS
Saturday, February 17: 1 st Week in Lent	5:00 PM In Person only
Sunday, February 18: 1 st Week in Lent	10:00 AM In Person & Live Stream

SERVING THE LORD IN THE POOR — FEBRUARY 17th:

Our Savior Lutheran Church — across the street from the Chapel — has a Food Pantry which distributes food to the community on the third Saturday of each month. They welcome volunteers. On Saturday morning at 9 AM, they need help unloading the trailers and setting up items for distribution and preparing for the food pantry to open. It serves around 150 clients each time. The food pantry serves clients from 9:30 AM—1:30 PM on Saturday.



Our Savior Lutheran’s Food Pantry was formed to serve those in emergency situations and/or with on-going need in the cities of Mayfield Heights, Mayfield Village, Highland Heights and Gates Mills. The Food Pantry respects social and cultural diversity and upholds the worth and dignity of those it serves. All those in the area with need will be served equally, as supplies allow. The food pantry is a member of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank.

REFLECTION FOR THE WEEK:

Rejection, exclusion, alienation and being ostracized are terrible words to hear — and worse to experience. The Body of Christ is alive as we are called to move out toward our sisters and brothers — God’s children. But throughout our journeys, we encounter bumps in the road. We wish it were smooth and easy to live, but it is not. We long for the grace to have clean hearts; we pray for the freedom to touch what calls to us to Christ for healing — to have our uncleanness touched by God. The Body of Christ needs to come alive within us; we need to reach out to those who are considered outside the camp, outside the circle, but who, by Christ’s touch, are truly members of his Body.

We are called to confront the rejection, exclusion, alienation and ostracization that we bring into our world, asking God to heal us from our sores, bumps, and various physical and emotional injuries experienced during our journeys, so that we might be better able to share in the grace to join Jesus in His ways of reaching out to those who are injured, sick, or alienated.

The original Garden of Eden was a picture of perfection and orderliness — everything had its name and proper place. Any imperfection, or something out of place was ungodly and so unholy [see Genesis 1]. But our sinfulness and our worldly condition would not allow this to continue. During the time of Jesus, leprosy was as feared as cancer is to us today.

The Book of Leviticus is one of the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures — the Torah. Its purpose was to deal with laws contributing to proper order in the camp resulting from God’s direct word through Moses and Aaron. Because leprosy was such a feared disease, the laws which dealt with leprosy were numerous. “Cleanliness was definitely next to godliness” — to use the worn-out phrase — and a reflection of the purity of God. Physical sickness of any form was some kind of sign that there was some interior impurity present. Distance, abandonment, and alienation from the “pure” was the prevention from further uncleanness.

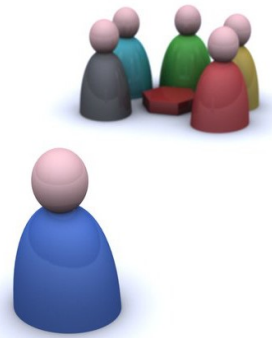
The person who was judged to have the disease by the priests, would have to walk around shouting their identity as “unclean” and live according to that name. If the person ever did, by chance, recover from the disease, there was an extensive process of examination, purification, and restoration back into the community.

In order to understand Mark’s Gospel, the fear and belief of the time has to be taken into account. The “unclean” person, instead of keeping their distance according to the tradition and the law, came to Jesus for healing — that is if Jesus was willing [Mark 1:40-45]. Jesus touched the person — not keeping his distance either! The physical healing took place as an act of faith. The person is told to go and show themselves to the priests and offer what Moses prescribed — and the long “ritual” process of cleansing began. The proof will be judged by the priests of the Law who then will ask how it all happened so quickly.

The cured person is now in the camp, and Mark states clearly that Jesus stayed outside in deserted places so as to remain available for further healings. He will remain an outsider welcoming people back in harmony with God and themselves.

Fear of exclusion and abandonment is central to our human condition. Billions of dollars are spent each year in the attempt to make sure that human beings remain accepted. Whatever the current form of leprosy might be, we can buy some kind of curative — it might be stylish clothing, a new make-over of face or hair. This can be done easily if one has a portion of those billions. But there is a non-physical, interior sickness however for which billions cannot be spent for healing, but for which Jesus spent His healing days, and continues in our days.

There are many forms of this “interioritis”. Each one of us can provide the name or names by which we declare ourselves: “Unclean!” “Enoughness” is such a disease. This form of disability

**BUILDING BRIDGES — NOT WALLS:**

Paul’s words to the Corinthians should ring throughout our lives — “I try to please everyone in every way, not seeking my own benefit but that of the many” [1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1]. As other Christ’s, our actions are geared to helping others, and not doing things for our own advantage. Pope Francis says it well: “We should be building bridges, not walls.”

We live in a world in which we’re convinced that walls help us personally much better than bridges. That’s especially true when it comes to those we fear. The laws about leprosy in the Book of Leviticus are a prime example [Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-45] — no one in the ancient world was feared more than a leper.

Leprosy back then was defined as any destructive skin condition. Though people knew nothing of germs, they were convinced a demon of leprosy had taken control of the afflicted person — a demon which could jump from person to person if someone was foolish enough to get close to the leper. One’s life was altered forever if he or she was declared a leper. [Though the 50’s movie *Ben Hur* wasn’t historical, most historians believe the Jerusalem village of lepers it depicted was fairly accurate — a hell on earth.] That’s why only a priest could officially proclaim someone leprosy. No “anonymous” accusations. Consequences were devastating.

Mark’s story of Jesus healing the leper [Mark 1:40-45] is composed against this background. Read it carefully. Not only does Jesus cure the leper and send him to the priests for verification, he breaks the Levitical regulations and actually “touches” him before he heals him. Jesus continues to demonstrate what evils he is going to deal with throughout his life. Obviously the “outcasts” around us are one of those evils. In Jesus’ faith, no one was out — everyone was in. Jesus expects his followers to constantly reach out — not cut off.

Second, the phrase “moved with pity” replaced the evangelist’s original phrase “moved with anger.” Textual critics tell us not only that the latter wording is found in the best Marcan manuscripts, but that it’s easier to see how a scribe would change anger to pity than pity to anger. After all, we’re dealing with Jesus of Nazareth. The question is, “Why’s Jesus angry?” He doesn’t seem to be angry with the leper; rather, according to most scholars, he’s uptight with a frame of mind which created an environment in which such people are officially walled off from everyone else. For me to succeed, some individuals must be permanently out of my life.

According to our sacred authors, both the historical and risen Jesus envision a different world — a place in which we demonstrate our belief in God being one with us by becoming one with all those around us — especially those whom society has barred from being part of “our world.”

As we know from Matthew 23, Jesus’ early followers pictured the church as the place where such unity should begin — a place where there’s no honorary titles to divide us or social status to separate us. But then somebody created clergy and laity. We’ve never been the same since.

Don’t let anyone tell you not to be angry over what we’ve created of Jesus’ church. According to Mark, Jesus was frequently angry when he shared his vision with his followers. Check the other five or six places in his gospel where he depicts an angry Jesus. Some things are worth getting emotional about.

Walls only come down when we actually tear them down — they normally don’t fall down on their own. No wonder Mark places such a disturbing action at the beginning of his gospel. That’s where Jesus believes it belongs — at the start of his good news.

—taken from the writings of Father Roger Karban, which appear on the internet

BEAUTY:

The gate of Heaven is very low; only the humble can enter it.

—St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

UNCLEAN!!!

The Scripture Readings for this 6th Week in Ordinary Time begin with the Book of Leviticus. We are given a few of the horrible rules established by the Mosaic community to protect itself from leprosy [Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-45]. In the ancient times leprosy was believed to be deforming, incurable, and contagious. Leprosy included most skin disorders — Hanson’s disease which is leprosy proper; Psoriasis — skin cancer; Impetigo — boils and even serious acne. Lepers were ostracized by their families and neighbors, and forced to live outside the villages and towns. They were referred to as the Living Dead. Lepers had to wear ragged clothes. They had to let their hair go uncombed and uncut. And they had to cover their mouths with one hand and call out: “Unclean, unclean” as they walked. Anyone who came into any contact whatsoever with a leper was considered to be unclean like the leper.

Jesus — moved with pity, stretched out his hand, touched the leper, and said to him, “Be made clean” [Mark 1:40-45]. Jesus did not see the unclean leper, or his disease. He was not concerned with the strict prohibitions of Jewish society. Jesus did not see a leper at all — he saw a human soul in desperate need. Jesus stretched out his hand and touched the leper. He healed the person with his touch.

Jesus gave this power to his disciples. At the conclusion of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus proclaims the signs of the members of his people. Among these signs is this one — they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover [Mark 16:18].

We possess the wonderful capacity to be instruments of the healing power of Christ. Therefore, we have the duty not only to pray for the sick and to help them get effective medical help, but also to pray over them and extend the touch of Christ to them. In his letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul challenges us to imitate Christ [1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1]. We are to be ministers of healing. We are to touch not just the physically sick, but all those whose lives are hurting and need healing in any way possible.

It is simply not Christian to ostracize anyone for any reason whatsoever. In the Christian society, even those with the most contagious diseases are cared for in a way that gives them dignity and love.

How about those who are spiritually sick? How about those who have left the Church — left Christianity? Are they to be cared for as those who are very sick? Absolutely. Those who have left Christian society are always welcomed back into the society when they seek to return. For example, even in the extremely rare cases of excommunication — such as when someone performs or assists in abortions — that person can always seek forgiveness and re-entry into the community.

And yet, many people throw children or relatives out of their lives — “You are no longer my son, my daughter,” a parent hisses. Is there ever a situation where there is no longer any possibility of healing, of mercy, of extending the hand of Christ to those who seek reconciliation? Not in Christianity. The Forgiving Father may not have been able to give his Prodigal Son the remainder of the farm. That belonged to the Elder Brother. But he was able to welcome the prodigal back into the family. The person who has hurt his or her spouse and children may not be able to resume his or her place in the marriage, but that person still can receive the forgiveness, the healing he or she longs for. The convicted murderer may never be able to re-assume a place in free society, but he or she can be forgiven and given an opportunity to turn to God while incarcerated.

When we allow ourselves to be so overcome by hurt and hatred that we refuse to extend the healing hand of the Lord to others, we take upon ourselves the sickness of the other person. Hatred kills. When we allow hatred to be part of our lives, we commit spiritual suicide. We cannot allow hatred to destroy us. Even in the wake of Moslem terrorism — even faced with the reality that there are many people in the world who hate us and who want us dead simply because we are Americans — we cannot allow hatred to destroy our humanity. Yes, we have to take measures to protect ourselves from those who would destroy us. Still, we do not have the right to hate anyone or any people, and at the same time call ourselves Christian.

The Gospels often note that Jesus was moved with pity for the people as he preached the Kingdom of God. When he faced the troubled, the abandoned, the sick, when stirred by the blind, when crossing paths with the widow of Nain, and today, when face to face with a leper, Jesus was moved not by disgust, not by antagonism, but by compassion. Having compassion and showing mercy are the Christian qualities of great minds and large hearts.

Today we are called to allow our hearts to be enlarged by Christianity.

—taken from the writings for Monsignor Joseph Pellegrino, which appear on the internet

subtracts us from “the camp” of social and assistive involvements. Past failures — or at least what we judged as failures — weaken our spirits into negativity, and we shout — sometimes very shyly and inconspicuously — “No, not me, I’m not enough for what’s being expected.” In this way, we can continue developing an “outside-the-camp” spirit of false humility, or maybe it is better named, pride. We also reduce the spirit of the “camp” and they are less for that subtraction.

Any healing in which Jesus is at the center, always — that is right — always moves us toward the investments, involvements, and interest in the well-being of the “camp” members. Harmony and order in whatever camp from which we come, remains God’s way of loving. Self-diminishing diminishes God’s presence among God’s people.

What Jesus did most for this person was His changing the person’s identity from “unclean” to a presence in the community of the Good News. What Jesus does most in our lives as Savior is the restoration of our good-enough-to-share self. We might have only one paint can, one color, maybe not filled to the brim and a smaller brush than others. Jesus painted our world with His color and invites us back always, into His camp, this world, and continues doing His thing.

Our leprosy might be an arrogance which says: “Somehow, I thought I should be more, better, excellent and super.” We come to Him, kneel down and after admitting our truth, Jesus’ constant: “I do will it” is His missioning healing response. We will know His “unleperous” healing when we want to get up, get back in, and begin painting.

—taken from the writings of Father Larry Gillick, S.J., which appear on the internet

A VEIN WORTH MINING:

St. Benedict had a sister — Scholastica — who also dedicated her life to the pursuit of God. She too founded monasteries and became an abbatial figure. The only story we have of Scholastica is told when Benedict was already an abbot of renown. The incident demonstrates clearly that the brother and sister were emotionally close, and both of them had a spiritual influence on the other till the time of her death.

During one of their annual visits, Scholastica, inspired by the depth of their conversation, asked Benedict to remain overnight in the place where they were meeting in order to continue their talk and reflection on spiritual things. Benedict wouldn’t even think of it. It was getting dark; it was time to get back to the monastery; it was time to get on with the regular routine of the spiritual life. Unable to persuade him with words, Scholastica put her head down on the table in deep prayer. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a great storm brought flash floods, and Benedict realized that he could not possibly return to the monastery that night. And the Dialogues say: “he complained bitterly.” He said: “God forgive you, sister! What have you done?” Scholastica answered simply: “I asked you for a favor and you refused. I asked my God and I got it.”

This story is a vein worth mining for a lifetime — it tells us that law is never greater than love; it tells us to be intent on pursuing the values of life, not simply its rules; it tells us that discipline is necessary in the spiritual life, but that religious discipline is not enough, that depth is a process and that depth costs; it tells us that God lurks in strange places, and waits for us, and puts in our paths just what we need in order to become what we are meant to be; it tells us that spiritual friendship is of the essence, everyone needs someone who knows their soul.

—taken from the writings of Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B., which appears on the internet

POWERFUL:

I will never apologize for embracing joy and beauty — even when the world is falling apart — because joy and beauty are my fuel for activism.

—Karen Walrond

WE ARE ALL LEPERS:

I once visited a leper colony in the Congo. It was about twenty years ago, and the clinic was run by a Religious Sister. There weren't too many lepers in the place at the time because advances in the medical treatment of leprosy now mean that it is no longer necessary for lepers to spend long periods in treatment. But there were, however, a number of people living there whose disfigurement was very great, or who had lost limbs as a result of the disease.

Sister explained that the real problem was finding the lepers because when people in the outlying villages discovered that they had leprosy, they were almost always filled with shame and tended to hide themselves away. Sister spent a lot of her time looking for them, but once she found them she could start them on a course of tablets lasting from between six to twelve months. After one month of treatment the disease is no longer infectious, and the patient can return to their village. The medicine is provided free by the World Health Organization. Sister explained that if leprosy was caught early enough the disease could be cured — but obviously not the physical effects such as lost fingers or toes, and neither could damage caused to the nervous system be repaired. So as far as she was concerned, it was absolutely vital to catch the patient early before too much damage had occurred.

The big problem is the social stigma caused by leprosy, and it is this that causes sufferers to hide themselves away. I suppose the stigma caused by leprosy is brought about by the way that the wider community has defended itself against leprosy over many hundreds of years. Stringent rules forbidding contact between the general population and lepers extending over many centuries has caused sufferers to experience a deep sense of shame.

The victims of leprosy invariably also suffer from extreme poverty because they lose feeling in their extremities, and this results in cuts which the sufferer does not feel, leading to the loss of fingers, toes or even whole hands and feet. The nervous and respiratory systems also become damaged. Weakness and weariness are common, and infection of the eyes is frequently present. All these consequences mean that lepers cannot fend for themselves in the normal way, and frequently end up facing hunger and homelessness. More than this, because lepers in the past were physically separated from their loved ones for fear of passing on the infection, severe loneliness was often a feature of leprosy.

In the ancient world diseases such as leprosy were often viewed as being the result of sin. This meant that lepers were very much looked down upon by others. It also explains the fact that in Jewish society they were sent to the priest for diagnosis and if the disease improved, it was only the priest who could declare them cured. This reinforced the spiritual dimension of the disease.

We heard in Mark's Gospel how Jesus cured people of all kinds of illnesses [see Mark 1:29-39]. But leprosy was considered by the population as being far more serious than any other sickness. By his curing of the leper Jesus puts himself in the category of a truly outstanding healer.

It is interesting to note that during his healing of the leper Jesus reaches out his hand and touches the person. This is a clear breach of one of the rules set down by Moses — touch was forbidden for fear of passing on the infection. But, of course, touch is often an important part of the healing process and Jesus does not hesitate to touch the person he is healing.

In hospitals, the doctors carry out the physical treatment but it is often the tender loving care given by the nurses that actually brings about the real healing. This TLC, as we call it, cannot be truly given without touching. Visitors of patients often touch and caress the patients — a very important communication.

When we consider the disease of leprosy, we can see too that it has many similarities with that other great disease that afflicts humankind — namely sin. Leprosy separates human beings from each other,



but sin separates us both from God and from each other. Sin brings division and damages the cohesion of the community.

One other aspect of leprosy and the way it was handled in the Jewish world, was that it rendered a person ritually unclean. In common with many other religions Judaism has this concept of ritual cleanness. A person can be ritually defiled by such things as menstruation, giving birth, touching a dead person, eating an unclean animal or, in this case, touching a person who has leprosy.

Once one was rendered unclean, then a process of ritual washing was necessary and quite often the passing of a certain period of time. For example, a woman was ritually impure for seven days after giving birth to a child. To a Jew being ritually impure meant that the individual could not enter the Temple, or have anything to do with whatever is regarded as holy without going through the rites of purification. Anyone who had contact with them while in an unclean state was also regarded as unclean. Uncleanness could spread from person to person as if it was an infection.

You can see then that leprosy, being regarded as an unclean state, has a strong link to sin. The disease is associated in the minds of the people as being the very opposite of holy, and therefore effectively a sinful state. All of this puts the healing of the leper into a much higher category than the healing of Peter's mother-in-law from a fever.

Until now there has been no mention of sin in connection with Jesus' healings, and, to be fair, it is not explicitly mentioned by Mark here. But the idea of sin is so strongly associated with leprosy that Jesus is coming close to doing what he does further on in the Gospels which is to say to the person being healed: "Your sins are forgiven" [see Mark 2:5].

With this healing of the leper, we are going to begin to see Jesus increasingly saying and doing things that properly belong only to God. This will win him the ire of the authorities and lead to his execution at their hands.

The leper was told by Jesus to go to the priests and to make the offering for his recovery. But so great is his joy that he first goes around proclaiming to everyone the story of his remarkable healing. This makes things a bit difficult for Jesus — making it hard for him to go around freely. We need to take a lesson from that leper — we should go around telling people about our story and about all that Jesus has done for us. Maybe we haven't been cured of leprosy, but without a doubt our lives have been transformed by our encounter with Jesus. Perhaps this is something we definitely ought to be shouting about!

—taken from the writings of Father Alex McAllister S.D.S., which appear on the internet

READINGS FOR THE WEEK:

Monday: James 1:1-11, Mark 8:11-13

Tuesday: James 1:12-18, Mark 8:14-21

Wednesday: Joel 2:12-18, 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2, Matthew 6:1-18

Thursday: Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Luke 9:22-25

Friday: Isaiah 58:1-9, Matthew 9:14-15

Saturday: Isaiah 58:9-14, Luke 5:27-32

1st Week in Lent: Genesis 9:8-15, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Mark 1:12-15