

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time – This coming Wednesday the Church begins the Season of Lent with Ash Wednesday. A little more about this later in this reflection.

God created us because He wants to be in relationship with us. He does not have to love us. God *wants to* love us! The reason we exist is *relationship*. We were made out of God's Love to be love for one another. This is a kind of Good News that is not possible without the Divine, for no other love for us is so pure, so unconditional, so freely given.

But, in spite of the perfection of this design, we are also broken by sin. Even though we are made for relationship, so many things separate us and limit the love for which we were created.

The first reading we have for this weekend from the Old Testament Book of Leviticus (part of the Torah) reminds us that physical circumstances such as illness can separate us from one another. There are many other physical forms of separation, such as a job that takes a loved one far away, an emotional wound that demands physical distance as a response, and, of course, death itself.

But spiritual separation also wounds us. Just as leprosy could be passed from one person to another, so also sin infects and hurts those who are most vulnerable. The damage of sin is infectious, just as physical illness is contagious.

This is the brokenness into which Jesus enters with His mercy. "If You wish, You can make me clean", says the leper to Jesus. Such faith as the leper's can lead us also to this confidence today. Jesus, the eternal Word of God, moved with pity, draws near to us. Just as in last week's Gospel Jesus reached out to Simon Peter's Mother in Law and healed her, Just as Jesus willed that the leper be healed, He reaches out to us, in a particular way through His sacramental presence in the Mass, because He wants to heal every separation, whether it be physical, emotional, or spiritual. *He does will* to make us clean.

What wounds can we bring to Jesus today? What broken relationship, separation, or sin needs Jesus' healing presence? This is why Jesus invites us. This is why He draws near and reaches out to us. Jesus extends the invitation to us. He extends His hand to lift us up. All that is needed on our part is to extend our hand to His – allowing Him to lift us from whatever it is that weighs heavy on us. "I do will it," He tells us. "Be made clean!" **With that thought in mind** – what a wonderful way to prepare to enter into the Penitential Season of Lent. He does want all of us to be clean – be it emotional, physical, or spiritual. What can we do to meet Jesus part way? What can we do during this penitential season that will help eliminate those areas of our lives that are not in line with His will?

You will be receiving in the mail (or may have already received) a booklet, along with a pamphlet with Lenten

suggestions. Please use this as a guide to help you on your Lenten Journey.

Along with your own Penitential exercises, please also consider those recommended by the Church-

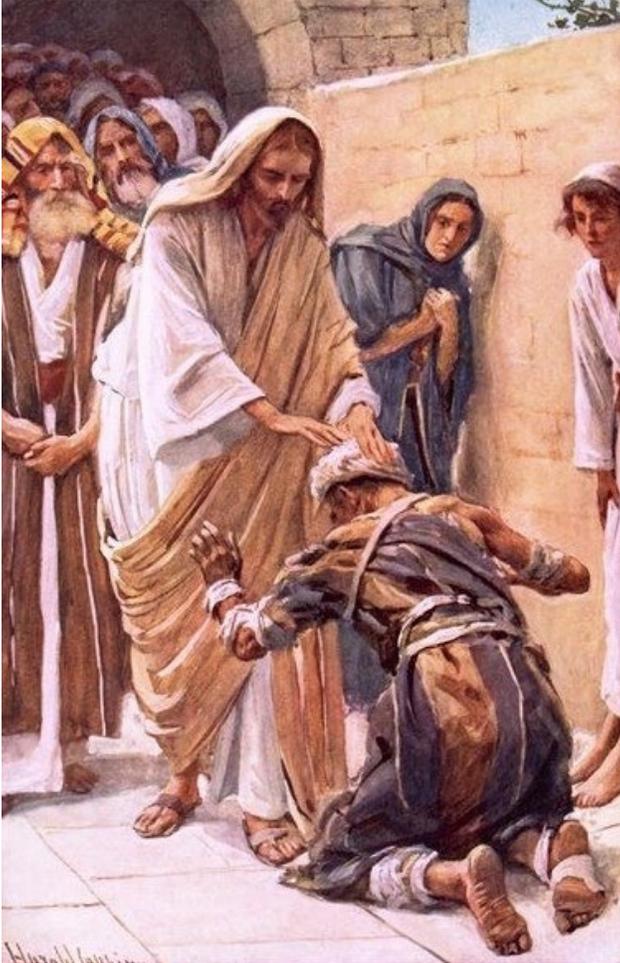
LENTEN REGULATIONS

Lent is the penitential season of the Church's Liturgical Calendar, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending with the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday. Traditionally the Lenten Season is a time of penance throughout the Universal Church. Lent is also a season during which prayer, the reception of the sacraments, charity and almsgiving are emphasized. Fast and abstinence are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. All the Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence from meat. On the weekdays of Lent, there is no obligation to fast. However, voluntary acts of self-denial are encouraged, regardless how young or old one may be. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of Fast, and Abstinence from meat. Limit of one full meal on these days for all between the ages of 18 and 59 (provided one is in good health and not advised otherwise by one's physician). And even though one may not have reached their 18th birthday yet, there is no reason why the youngster can't begin practicing Fast and Abstinence. All who have reached their 14th year are bound to abstain totally from meat (and again, even if younger, the practice can begin with the younger members of the family).

REGARDING THE EASTER DUTY – The Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion are to be received during the Easter Season. Please try to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation as soon as possible, and as often as possible.

As mentioned in last week's bulletin - Ash Wednesday - The distribution of ashes will take place in a different fashion this year. Therefore a number of practical matters must be considered: • Sprinkling with ashes is messy. These ashes will not remain on your head. They will fall onto your face, onto clothing, onto the pews and floor. • When receiving this ritual sprinkling you may wish to close your eyes. These fine particles, unfortunately, will serve as an irritant. • No extraordinary care is required when cleaning ashes from clothing, seating surfaces, etc. As a sacramental, these ashes remind us that everything God has fashioned is holy. However, they need not be treated with the same respect that we afford sacraments. Please remember that the reception of ashes on Ash Wednesday is not required. Whether participating in this ritual or not, all the faithful are urged to undertake penitential practices during these Lenten days. Together with the whole Church throughout the world we journey with the one who will turn our sorrow to joy.

Let us pray for the Conversion of the World
& for Peace



Saints this week –

February 14 – Ss Cyril & Methodius – brothers born in Greece. Cyril was baptized Constantine, and later assumed the name Cyril when he became a monk. His brother Methodius served as governor of the Slav colonies. Afterward he became a monk. In 862 Prince Rotislav of Moravia asked the Eastern Emperor for Christian missionaries to teach the Gospel to his people in their native language. Cyril and Methodius prepared liturgical books and later translated the Scriptures into the Slavic language. They also provided an alphabet for their writing.

ALSO – Today – St Valentine - Saint Valentine known as Saint Valentine of Rome was a widely recognized 3rd-century Roman saint, commemorated in Christianity on February 14. From the High Middle Ages his Saints' Day has been associated with a tradition of courtly love. He is also a patron saint of epilepsy.

