

HOMILY – SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME “B” 2/11/18

Many years ago there was a very powerful movie titled “The Elephant Man”. It was the story of a man in nineteenth-century England who suffered from a horrible skin disease. His head had swelled up and was greatly enlarged and deformed. His skin was grossly wrinkled and had the appearance of almost elephant-like skin. From childhood on until he was in his early twenties he was treated as a freak and forcefully made to work in a side-show for a traveling circus. He was considered an idiot until doctors eventually discovered he was not mentally challenged and was actually quite literate and was well read and had a great ear for music. He was finally able to escape the circus and when in public he would cover his head with a piece of sack cloth. But one day, his appearance terrified a small child. Angry people chased him and ripped the sack off his head. Then someone in the crowd asked, “What is that?”, and he replied, **“I am a human being – I am a human being.”** How terribly painful it must have been for him to be stripped of his human dignity that he had to tell people over and over **“I am a human being”!**

What we heard narrated in the first reading was how in ancient times people with the disease of leprosy were to be treated. They were isolated from society and family, they had to cry out “unclean, unclean” as soon as anyone approached them. Like the “Elephant Man” they were stripped of all human dignity. Can you imagine the shock of the people in the Gospel when the leper approached Jesus and Jesus reached out to touch him? But even more, the reaction of the leper? How long had it been since another human being had touched him? How long had it been that he had experienced the isolation of having no warm, affirming human relationships – longing to be touched or embraced by another human being? What overpowering feelings must have welled up inside of him when he felt Jesus touching him! When Jesus broke the law and reached out to this man who was disfigured and repulsive-looking, he was equivalently saying to him, “Even though you have been degraded and treated as something less than human, I am saying to you now, **‘You are a human being – you are a human being.’”**

Although we don’t see physical leprosy anymore, the emotional deprivation that went along with it is still very much with us in our world today. There are many people who don’t have a close relationship with anybody. They are the “Elephant” men and women of our time. They may be the aging parents whose children never come by to see them, the senior abandoned in a nursing home, the mentally ill, the AIDS victim, the bullied child at school, the undocumented immigrant, the stereotyped Moslem, or the physically challenged individual left out of activities.

There is no easy solution for the inner pain that many people experience – whether it is the leprosy of emotional deprivation or the suffering of those discriminated or stereotyped by an intolerant society. **“Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him.”** We can all stretch out our hands and our arms with compassion, and touch someone’s life in deeper, more honest and more enriching ways. That’s what the Lord challenged us to do when he reached out and touched the leper in today’s gospel – he

challenged all of us to reach more deeply inside ourselves – to touch the deepest, purest humanity within us – to have the courage to raise up even the most rejected person with the message, **“You are a human being, a child of God, my brother or sister.”**

Closing Story 2-11-18

As you all know, every week I have a little story but it is my tradition that during the Lenten Season I don't do that. Not because I don't think laughter is good, but I want you to be the messengers of joy. So, I will continue it after the Lenten Season is over.

Today there is a little story about a man named Ed who was in deep trouble. He forgot his wedding anniversary. So his wife was quite upset and she told him, “Tomorrow morning I expect to find a gift in the driveway that goes from 0-200 in 6 seconds, and it better be there!”

The next morning Ed got up early and left for work and when his wife woke up she looked out the window and sure enough there was a medium-sized gift-wrapped box in the middle of the driveway. A little confused, the wife put on her robe and ran out to the driveway and brought the box back into the house. She carefully unwrapped it and found a brand new bathroom scale.

Funeral services for Ed have been scheduled for Friday.