

(B6) SUNDAY 6 OF THE YEAR

(FEBRUARY 14TH, 2021)

Readings: *Leviticus 13:1,2,44 – 46; Ps. 31(32):1,2,5,6,12;*
1 Corinthians 10:31 – 11:1; Mark 1:40 – 4.

The readings for today are a happy group for this, the Sunday before Lent.

Whatever the precise nature of the illness suffered by the man in today's Gospel, he was excluded from the community, unable to take part in the worship of God, and required to dress in a way which emphasised that he was different from others. In several Old Testament passages the disease is regarded as a punishment for sin – an added reason for avoiding contact. But Jesus breaks this taboo, as he has broken others. He goes further than the leper has asked: Not only does he command, *Be cured*, he *stretched out his hand and touched him*.

Here is the sort of incident which Paul may have been thinking of when he wrote to the Corinthians, *Take me for your model, as I take Christ*. Jesus is not concerned either with what people think of his actions, or with his own safety – only with the welfare of the man for whom he has compassion. Similarly, Paul writes that he is *not anxious for (his) own advantage but for the advantage of everybody else, so that they may be saved*.

Paul's advice – originally given to those who were anxious about what they could or could not eat – gives us a good starting point for our Lenten discipline: *Whatever you do at all, do it for the glory of God*. He goes on to suggest what we should not do: *Never do anything offensive to anyone – to Jews or Greeks or to the Church of God*. We might paraphrase that by saying "Don't do anything offensive – to those of other faiths, to those who have no religious belief, or to your fellow Christians."

And then, with the words I've already quoted, he moves from the negative – what we shouldn't do – to the positive. We are to take Christ as our model.

For some of us the usual Lenten disciplines and activities will be impossible during this pandemic. We may struggle to find practical ways in which we can grow in faith. But we can – in everything we do – seek to be more Christlike.

In today's collect are words we might well use as we prepare for Lent: *Grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace as to become a dwelling place pleasing to you*.