

**HOMILY HELPS**  
**Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (World Marriage Day)**  
**February 12, 2012**

1. Perhaps acknowledge humorously that the readings have nothing to do with marriage, and in fact revolve around purity laws regarding leprosy. Not all that promising!
2. “Leprosy” in antiquity included the disease that we now call leprosy, or Hansen’s disease, but it included a lot of other diseases of the skin, at least in their earlier stages when one could not be sure if it were the degenerative disease or something else. Though we may question its harshness, the purity law for leprosy makes sense in a society where there was no known cure, and where it was believed to be more contagious than it actually is, because it was confused with so many other contagious diseases.
3. The Law prescribed separation from the encampment, or village. Persons declared unclean for leprosy had to live apart from their families. They had to announce their status to all who encountered them on the road, or anywhere else, as we can see from the first reading. The word “leper” thus became synonymous with “outcast.” Leprosy was not only a physical disease, but also a symbol of social rejection and isolation.
4. The ancient purity laws also prescribed what to offer in cases where there was a recovery or healing. Since not every case declared unclean would actually represent what we now call Hansen’s disease, but something less serious, these healings were probably not infrequent, and the law prescribed an offering for the healing as a way of thanking God and of being reintegrated into the community. Healing from the disease was also recovery of one’s social and community status.
5. Thus the ancient purity laws were not only meant to safeguard the community from the spread of disease, but they were also a way of seeking for, waiting for, and noticing healing. They ritualized the hope for healing.
6. The Gospel miracle of the healing of the leper, right at the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry, announces that Jesus is ushering in an economy of healing and is fulfilling the Law in that sense. The Law is invoked here to make sure the hearer of the Gospel understands the significance of this one particular healing. Jesus’s healing of the leper in the story is “immediate,” a reflection of Jesus’s will; it comes directly from His person and presence. Jesus brings an economy of healing. It accompanies His person and in fact it is His person. Jesus Himself is the healing that the Law was hoping for, was awaiting, was seeking, not just healing from leprosy, but from all that it

symbolized – lack, disintegration, isolation, emptiness of soul. The healing announces Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law.

7. Of course, Jesus did not heal every leper he met, or every sick person. The healing that Jesus came to bring is more than a physical healing; it is His love, as an invitation to communion with Him in eternal life. The physical healings that He accomplished revealed this love, were signs of this love that is the essence of the Good News. It is God's love that is healing in every sense of the word, because it offers integration into the largest and most beautiful society of all, the communion of saints, a communion of eternal, satisfying, love.
8. This is where marriage comes in. Not as a form of leprosy! Far from it. But as part of the economy of healing love that Jesus brings. Marriage is a communion of two persons, a man and a woman, whose love is configured to, or shaped by, the very love that Jesus reveals in this healing. Jesus wills to heal the leper out of His profound and intimately personal compassion. It must have been embarrassing to ask for a healing! It involved one's own body, in all likelihood disfigured, still awaiting healing, hoping against hope. It is an intimate request. Jesus does not embarrass the man but, out of his immense compassion, heals him instantly and without any strings attached except that he obey the law and make a thank offering.
9. The love that forms the communion between husband and wife is this very same healing and compassionate love of Jesus. That is why we call marriage a sacrament. The compassionate, healing love of Jesus Christ is intimately and immediately present to spouses in their love for each other. Christian marriage is a particular form of participation in this economy of healing love that comes from the Lord Jesus. The day in and day out fidelity of Christian spouses to each other is not glitzy or flashy but it is the quiet, progressive healing of the soul at the very deepest, most intimate, level. Married in Christ, the spouses lift each other out of the "leprosy" of a world where efficiency is often valued over persons, where "having" is often valued more than "being." The married couple becomes a new community that is a true home, each the home for the other, where each may encounter the healing, compassionate love of the Lord Jesus "immediately," as did the leper in the Gospel.
10. What is more, this healing and compassion extend outward, to the world itself. The "home" that is the communion of spouses is the focal point of renewal in the world. It begins to organize a community, the family, according to the healing and compassionate love of the Lord, instead of the alienating, worldly values of efficiency over persons, and having over "being." This is the "domestic church." These are the ones who have listened to the Apostle Paul saying, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

11. The love between the spouses thus reveals itself more and more as the healing and compassionate love of Christ, binding the spouses ever more closely to each other. Their union radiates a life of healing for all of the many "lepers" the world may have rejected, may have sent one's way, to feel the intimate and immediate healing will of the Lord, in short, to feel loved, when they had felt unloved, desperate, or left behind. Such is the power of healing and love that Christian marriage, and the Christian family, offers our world today.