

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time year B 2009

1. Back in the 1980's my niece was a bright young teenager; active in sports and excelling in school,
2. She was a swimmer, so good in fact that there was talk of possibly trying out for the olympics.
3. And moreover she was beautiful; strong broad shoulders and a teeny tiny waist, people always used to exclaim how pretty she was, and how thin!
4. It was only later that we discovered the reason for this thinness.
5. She was bulimic.
6. The discovery of this began years of therapy as her parents sought to cure her of this illness and restore her health
7. But also to discover the reason for her illness.
8. What her family discovered was what so many parents of bulimic children discover.
9. That it is precisely the attention of others due to her thinness,
10. The love she was sure she would win from others,
11. The feeling of acceptance she would feel from being part of the beautiful "in" crowd
12. That caused her to throw up the food she had just eaten.
13. She so wanted to to be accepted and loved, however, that she began to separate herself emotionally from her family and friends in order to hide her secret.
14. Her bulimia reminded us, in fact reminds us all
 - a. That while we might not be bulimic,
 - b. That desire to be accepted and loved,
 - c. Will cause us to do things;
 - i. to the point of hurting ourselves and others
 - d. so that we might win the love of others.
15. We have to understand that about ourselves
 - a. in order to begin to understand the words of this morning's first reading.
16. For the book of Leviticus commands
 - a. that a leper must separate from the people of Israel;
 - b. to live apart, dressed like a person doing penance,
 - c. warning everyone, even their families,
 - d. who might try to come close that they were unclean.
17. Moreover since any skin disease could classify someone as a leper
 - a. from the actual disease called leprosy
 - b. to a bad case of acne,
18. anyone could run the risk of being labeled as unclean and thus being
 - a. excluded from the families that offered them support,
 - b. excluded from the tribes that offered them protection and ultimately
 - c. excluded from God's chosen people.
19. It seems so harsh; and yet the reason this rule was so important
 - a. that it was considered part of God's law
 - b. was not because they wanted to be cruel;
 - c. it was because they wanted to be loved.
20. God loved the people of Israel. And Israel loved God.
21. If God called the people to be holy, to be clean,
 - a. not of dirt but of sin or fault,
 - b. to be as perfect as the priests had to be,
 - c. as perfect as their offering had to be,

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22. Well then the people were going to exclude anyone that jeopardized that holiness;
 - a. because that was how they expressed their desire
 - i. to be accepted and loved by God.
23. But Jesus had other ideas.
 - a. When he meets a leper in this morning's Gospel reading,
 - b. he does not avoid him but approaches him;
 - c. does not ignore him but talks to him,
 - i. touches him and heals him,
 - ii. restoring him to his family his tribe and God's people.
24. Little wonder Jesus got into so much trouble.
 - a. Because Jesus did not reject the leper,
 - b. according to the law he became unclean like the leper;
 - c. and if the leper was supposed to be rejected then he was too.
25. But when Jesus touches the leper, Jesus does not become unclean,
 - a. instead the leper becomes clean.
26. Many might have missed the point, but Mark doesn't and neither should we.
27. God's love is not expressed through exclusion;
 - a. but through inclusion;
 - b. not through rejection but acceptance.
28. God offer this love to us all the time.
 - a. ,but most importantly in the sacrament of confession;
 - b. You remember, right?
 - c. For us confession might mean many things;
 - d. But really all confession is, is doing what the leper did; going to Jesus
 - i. and being honest with who we are,
 - ii. and sincere in our desire to be accepted and loved by God.
 - e. And then letting Jesus do to us what Jesus did to that leper;
 - i. Speak to us, listen to us, touch us and forgive us, restoring our relationship with God and the church.
 - f. And all God asks of in return; God's only law according to Jesus, is that we do the same for others.
29. We do things like this all the time here in church;
30. We see it in the baptism we celebrated this morning; in our blessing of people preparing for their sacraments.
31. We see it in the welcome we give to new people,
32. The support we give to long time parishioners
33. And the acceptance we show everyone who walks through that door;
34. And while this might seem small and insignificant; it is not!
35. Because the acceptance that comes through love can work miracles;
36. Just ask my niece.
37. She struggled with bulimia for years;
38. But no longer. Why? She fell in love; someone who loved her for who she was, not just how she looked. And that accepting love made her realize she did not need to punish her body. In short it healed her.
39. Just imagine what it could do for others! And it does, every time we allow ourselves to be Jesus' hand, sharing with them, what he shared with that leper, and shares with us.