

# Sunday Message

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THE WORD

Year B • 11 February 2024 • Psalter Week 2

## THE POWER OF TOUCH

MARK 1:40-45

Think of what it would be like to be deprived of touch, to be starved of it, to never experience it at all. In the 1960s, a social scientist called Harry Harlow carried out an experiment on infant rhesus monkeys.

He cut them off from all contact and deprived them of touch for a full year. He wanted to see how it would affect them. After 30 days, he assessed the monkeys as being enormously disturbed. The longer they were isolated, the more it affected their immune systems and their behaviours. They began to self-harm. After a full year, they were largely incapable of functioning at all. They were suffering from what social scientists call 'skin hunger,' touch deprivation. Harlow's results are replicated each year by the estimated 80 thousand American prison inmates held in solitary confinement. Experts say skin hunger is a major factor in incidents of depression among humans, just as it was among those monkeys.

Now consider the power of loving, gentle touch, skin on skin. Almost a decade ago, I developed chronic lower back pain. Even after five major surgeries, the pain remained as persistent as ever. Loving me as intensely as they did, my parents felt my pain. A wonderful source of comfort to me during that time was when my mother would give me a back rub. She would gently run her hands over that part of my back where the pain was most acute. It was extraordinarily soothing. For just a little while, my pain was eased. Her loving, gentle touch brought me wonderful comfort and consolation. The healing power of a mother's touch.

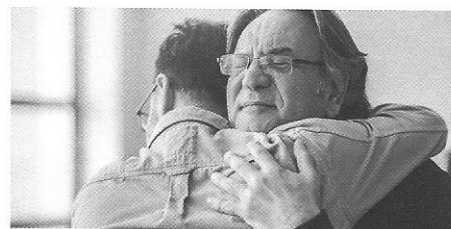
Jesus's ministry was all about healing, transforming, making whole what was broken. And he knew the power of touch. We see it over and over again in the Gospels. See how Jesus reaches out and touches the man with leprosy in today's Gospel. A gentle touch is all it takes and he is healed.

Time and again in the Gospels we find the same story repeated. Jesus meets someone in distress and reaches out to touch them. He touches them, and their health is restored. He touches them, and they are made new. The blind see, the crippled walk, haemorrhages dry up, the dead are restored to life. All because of Jesus' touch.

Jesus didn't need to physically touch them. His word alone would have been sufficient. But he chose to do so. He wanted to do so. He was deliberately, consciously tactile, because he knew the power and necessity of human touch, its capacity to soothe and heal. ■

### DO

Give someone close to you a gentle hug or hold their hand. Let them feel your loving presence.



### PRAY

Pray that the Lord will touch you, as he touched the man with leprosy, so as to make you the kind of person he wants you to be.

### SAY

"Jesus, help me to reach out to others in a way that is life-giving. Amen."

### LEARN

A sacrament is a grace-filled encounter with Christ. In the sacrament of the sick, in the anointing with oils on the forehead and on the hands, Christ touches us. Christ comes to us, to wrap us in his tender embrace, to bless us in our weariness, encourage us in our sadness, strengthen us in our weakness, ease us in our pain, forgive us in our sins, lift us in our worries, sustain us for whatever lies ahead.

In the Eucharist we encounter Christ in a most intimate way. We receive his own Body and make it part of ours. His gentle, grace-filled touch nourishes us for the journey of life.

### REFLECT

Unless we live in solitary confinement, we touch people every day – family, friends, work colleagues – and it's good to think about how we touch them.

We touch them not only through physical touch, but also through word and gesture. The way we touch others can be positive or negative. It can build up or knock down. It can be constructive and life-enhancing or destructive and life-diminishing.

We can touch someone with a warm hug or embrace. Or we can touch someone with a slap or a beating. Domestic violence

and physical and sexual abuse are major problems that we still need to address as Church and society.

We can touch someone with a word of encouragement or gratitude or love. Or we can touch someone with a word of contempt or anger or abuse. We know all too well that words have the power to wound even more deeply than a physical blow, and that bullying in schools and in the workplace is a major problem, made even worse now by the internet.

We can touch someone with a gesture that shows respect or appreciation or thanks. Or

a gesture that shows anger or contempt or impatience. Think of the many incidents of road rage we hear about today.

Jesus' touch gave people life. All he said and did gave people life. He gives us life even now when we are touched by him in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of the sick.

And that is our challenge – to invite Jesus to touch and transform us, in the Eucharist, in the sacraments, in our life of prayer. And we are challenged also to bring the gentle touch of Jesus to all those whose lives touch ours. ■

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Be my protector, O God,  
a mighty stronghold to save me.  
For you are my rock, my stronghold!  
Lead me, guide me, for the sake of your name.

**GLORIA**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,  
we bless you,  
we adore you,  
we glorify you,  
we give you thanks for your great glory,  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,  
you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us;  
you take away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

**COLLECT**

O God, who teach us that you abide  
in hearts that are just and true,  
grant that we may be so fashioned by your  
grace  
as to become a dwelling pleasing to you.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the  
Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING**

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

A reading from the book of Leviticus.

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'If a swelling  
or scab or shiny spot appears on a man's skin,  
a case of leprosy of the skin is to be suspected.  
The man must be taken to Aaron, the priest, or  
to one of the priests who are his sons.  
'The man is leprous: he is unclean. The priest  
must declare him unclean; he is suffering  
from leprosy of the head. A man infected with  
leprosy must wear his clothing torn and his hair  
disordered; he must shield his upper lip and cry,  
"Unclean, unclean." As long as the disease lasts  
he must be unclean; and therefore he must live  
apart: he must live outside the camp.'

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 31 (32):1-2, 5, 11

Response:

**You are my refuge, O Lord;  
you fill me with the joy of salvation.**

1 Happy the man whose offence is forgiven,  
whose sin is remitted.

O happy the man to whom the Lord  
imputes no guilt,  
in whose spirit is no guile. (R.)

2 But now I have acknowledged my sins;  
my guilt I did not hide.  
I said: 'I will confess  
my offence to the Lord.'

And you, Lord, have forgiven  
the guilt of my sin. (R.)

3 Rejoice, rejoice in the Lord,  
exult, you just!  
O come, ring out your joy,  
all you upright of heart. (R.)

**SECOND READING** 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the  
Corinthians.

Whatever you eat, whatever you drink, whatever  
you do at all, do it for the glory of God. Never  
do anything offensive to anyone – to Jews or  
Greeks or to the Church of God; just as I try to  
be helpful to everyone at all times, not anxious  
for my own advantage but for the advantage  
of everybody else, so that they may be saved.  
Take me for your model, as I take Christ.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!

May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ  
enlighten the eyes of our mind,  
so that we can see what hope his call holds  
for us.

Alleluia!

**GOSPEL**

Mark 1:40-45

A Reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Mark.

A leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his  
knees: 'If you want to' he said 'you can cure  
me.' Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out  
his hand and touched him. 'Of course I want  
to!' he said. 'Be cured!' And the leprosy left him  
at once and he was cured. Jesus immediately  
sent him away and sternly ordered him, 'Mind  
you say nothing to anyone, but go and show  
yourself to the priest, and make the offering for  
your healing prescribed by Moses as evidence  
of your recovery.' The man went away, but  
then started talking about it freely and telling  
the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no  
longer go openly into any town, but had to stay  
outside in places where nobody lived. Even so,  
people from all around would come to him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.  
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with  
the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
(all bow during the next three lines)  
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the  
Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under  
Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day

in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored  
and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and  
apostolic Church.  
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness  
of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the  
dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

May this oblation, O Lord, we pray,  
cleanse and renew us  
and may it become for those who do your will  
the source of eternal reward.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

They ate and had their fill,  
and what they craved the Lord gave them;  
they were not disappointed in what they  
craved.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Having fed upon these heavenly delights,  
we pray, O Lord,  
that we may always long  
for that food by which we truly live.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Father in heaven, you have made us for yourself;  
our hearts are restless until they rest in you.  
Fulfil this longing through Jesus, the bread of  
life, so that we may witness to him who alone  
satisfies the hungers of the human family. By  
the power of your Spirit lead us to the heavenly  
table where we may feast on the vision of your  
glory for ever and ever. Amen.