

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark.

A leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, "if you wish, you can make me clean." Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand, touched him, and said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean." The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean.

Then, warning him sternly, He dismissed him at once. Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them."

The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere. The Gospel of the Lord.

About one hundred and forty years ago, in 1882 a woman named Mary Reed from a small town in Ohio traveled to India. While there, Mary decided to visit a leper colony. Mary was moved with compassion as she saw these desperate, isolated people, suffering from this awful disease. Mary made a decision to join the colony where she eventually became head of the leper community. She personally saw the needs of the patients and greatly improved their living conditions. Over time, she replaced huts with cottages and oversaw the construction of a new water-supply system, a chapel, a school, a small hospital. She acquired 48 more acres of land and supervised six village schools. Eventually, Mary herself contracted leprosy but she continued her work. In 1917, the Government of India recognized Reed and gave her a prestigious Medal for her great contribution. Six years after her death, the Leprosy Hospital was renamed the Mary Reed Memorial Hospital.

It was compassion which motivated Mary Reed to give her life to a desperate people, and it was out of compassion that moved Jesus to reach out and touch the untouchable Leper.

What does it mean to be compassionate? It means to recognize the suffering of others and then take action to help alleviate it. Compassion is an expression of love for those who are in pain.

I have a cousin, Father Joe Bisson who is now a retired missionary Priest. When Joe was in High School, a Priest came and gave a presentation about Papua New Guinea. He showed many pictures of people living in isolated and primitive conditions.

Joe later told me how that presentation touched him; and how he was determined to go there and make a difference. After high school, Joe studied for Priesthood and was ordained for the Divine Word Missionary Order. Fr. Joe was asked to list three locations he preferred to be assigned. Joe wrote down Papua New Guinea for all three of his preferences. Fr. Joe live and worked in the mountains of Papua New Guinea for over 53 years. Fr. Joe helped built schools, medical facilities, churches and spread the Gospel. Two years ago, he was invited back to the country to receive a prestigious government medal for all those years of service.

My cousin, Fr. Joe recognized the suffering of others and took action to help alleviate it. Joe now lives in the united states but whenever we talk about Papua New Guinea, I can see and hear the love he has for the people in his face and his voice.

Like Fr. Joe, Jesus is moved by the sight of the suffering of the Leper who approaches him. The Leper did not keep his distance that the law required, he was close, that the Lord could reach out and touch him. One touch of the master's hand set him free. The leper went from being an outcast to a member of society.

He went from being physically ill, to being healthy. No wonder the man could not keep quiet, he got his life back, he will now be able to see his family, probable his wife and children, his neighbors and friends. His joy must have been overflowing. He no longer had to tell himself and others that he was unclean because Jesus declared Him clean.

In 1963 a song was written about the Leper and Jesus called "He touched me." I can almost hear the Leper singing those words.

Shackled by a heavy burden  
Beneath a load of guilt and shame  
Then the hand of Jesus touched me  
And I am no longer the same

He touched me, oh he touched me  
and oh, the joy that floods my soul  
Something happened and now I know  
He touched me and made me whole

Saint Mother Teresa said, "The greatest disease in the West today is not leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love."

My friends, we do not need to travel to India or Papua New Guinea to find those in need of our compassion, they are all around us.

Compassion is a virtue which is present in everyone. This week, think of the one person most need of compassion, someone who is lonely, who feels left out or is isolated from others. Send them

a card, talked to them on the phone or ask them if there is anything you can help them with.

Let us pray: Please pray after me. Compassionate Lord, you always knew who was most in need of your love and care and you reached out to them. I open my heart and invite your Holy Spirit to fill me with compassion for those most in need. Amen and Amen.