



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

ANGELUS

*Saint Peter's Square
Sunday, 15 February 2009*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During these Sundays the Evangelist Mark has offered for our reflection a sequence of various miraculous cures. Today he presents to us a very special one, the healing of a leper (Mk 1: 40-45) who approached Jesus and, kneeling down begs him: "If you wish, you can make me clean". Jesus, moved with pity, stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him: "I do will it. Be made clean!". And the man was instantly healed. Jesus asked him to say nothing about the event but to present himself to the priests to offer the sacrifice prescribed by the Mosaic law. However, the leper who had been healed was not able to keep quiet about it and instead proclaimed what had happened to him to all so that the Evangelist recounts the sick flocked to Jesus in even greater numbers, to the extent of forcing him to remain outside the towns to avoid being besieged by people.

Jesus said to the leper: "Be made clean!". According to the ancient Jewish law (cf. Lv 13-14), leprosy was not only considered a disease but also the most serious form of ritual "impurity". It was the priests' duty to diagnose it and to declare unclean the sick person who had to be isolated from the community and live outside the populated area until his eventual and well-certified recovery. Thus, leprosy constituted a kind of religious and civil death, and its healing a kind of resurrection. It is possible to see leprosy as a symbol of sin, which is the true impurity of heart that can distance us from God. It is not in fact the physical disease of leprosy that separates us from God as the ancient norms supposed but sin, spiritual and moral evil. This is why the Psalmist exclaims: "Blessed is he whose fault is taken away, / whose sin is covered", and then says, addressing God: "I acknowledged my sin to you, / my guilt I covered not. / I said, "I confess my

faults to the Lord' / and you took away the guilt of my sin" (32[31]: 1, 5). The sins that we commit distance us from God and, if we do not humbly confess them, trusting in divine mercy, they will finally bring about the death of the soul. This miracle thus has a strong symbolic value. Jesus, as Isaiah had prophesied, is the Servant of the Lord who "has borne our griefs / and carried our sorrows" (Is 53: 4). In his Passion he will become as a leper, made impure by our sins, separated from God: he will do all this out of love, to obtain for us reconciliation, forgiveness and salvation. In the Sacrament of Penance, the Crucified and Risen Christ purifies us through his ministers with his infinite mercy, restores us to communion with the heavenly Father and with our brothers and makes us a gift of his love, his joy and his peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us invoke the Virgin Mary whom God preserved from every stain of sin so that she may help us to avoid sin and to have frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Confession, the sacrament of forgiveness, whose value and importance for our Christian life must be rediscovered today.

After the Angelus:

I greet all the English-speaking visitors and pilgrims here today for the *Angelus*, especially the members of the joint Catholic-Orthodox pilgrimage from Finland. I pray that the time you spend in Rome may deepen your love for Jesus Christ our Lord, and for his Church. In this Sunday's Gospel, we hear how Jesus healed a leper who came to him and pleaded to be cured. To those who turn to him today, Jesus continues to offer healing and strength. I encourage all of you to place your trust in him, and to bring before him your hopes and your needs, for yourselves and for your loved ones. May the Lord grant your prayers and pour out upon all of you his abundant blessings.

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