

BUT WE HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST...

In the first book of Corinthians Paul writes about true wisdom. In this section of the letter he writes, "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." What does it mean to have the mind of Christ? How do we come to this knowledge? One of the surest ways of putting on the mind of Christ is through studying the life of Jesus in the Gospels. The Gospels are written in such a way as to reflect who Christ is and how does he want us to live.

Today's Gospel gives us an opening into the way that the historical Jesus thought. It shows that Jesus was a man of compassion who was moved by the suffering of the people of his day.

LEPROSY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The first reading gives us background into understanding the gospel we hear proclaimed. This reading comes from the Book of Leviticus. The reading reflects laws concerning people with leprosy. The leprosy that is referred to in the Book of Leviticus is not what we commonly think of as Hanson's disease but instead a wide variety of skin diseases. As the first reading shows a leper had to live outside of society. They had to wear torn clothes and have disheveled hair and live alone in a dwelling outside the camp and call out "unclean, unclean." Physical contact with such a person rendered one unclean. Hanson's disease traveled to the Near East from India in about 300 BC so it could have existed in the Holy Land at the time of Christ. Leprosy was thought to be like death and a cure of leprosy was like being raised from the dead.

These skin diseases were thought to be contagious thus until it could be proven that you were healed you had to remain separated from others. This separation kept the community safe from contracting leprosy. Thus, leprosy was not only physically painful but also emotionally painful. A person not only had to deal with the skin illness from which he suffered but he had to deal with the separation from family and friends. The sick person was cut off from family and friends at the time he/she needed them most.

MOVED FROM DEEP WITHIN

With this in mind we better understand the situation of the leper who approaches Jesus. The man begins by kneeling at the feet of Jesus and states that he believes that Jesus can heal him. There is a sense that this man knows Jesus is divine.

In the Gospel a man with an illness leaves his prescribed place and tentatively asks Jesus for help. Jesus responds with deep emotion. The word for that is translated "moved with compassion" means to have a gut reaction. Instead of recoiling from the man Jesus reaches out to him, touches him, says that he does will that the man be made clean.

Jesus' humanity comes out in this reading. Jesus shows compassion and touches the leper which affirms their common humanity and incurs ritual defilement.

"NOT A WORD TO ANYONE NOW."

Jesus gives the man a curious command. Jesus tells the man to be silent. Instead the man tells everyone that he has been healed. This man who has been healed and brought back together with his family, friends and the worshiping community cannot help but announce what Jesus has done for him.

One way in which I can begin to understand the feelings of the leper is to reflect on my journey back to California each summer. I am able to see my family once a summer. When I get off the plane I always look forward to seeing my mother and brothers and sister. This reunion is always one of great joy. This gives me a small sense of how this man must have felt as he was able to freely return to and to be part of the life of his family and friends once again.

OUR LEPERS

At the beginning of the homily I stated that this reading gives us a glimpse into the mind of Christ so that we can better live the life of Christ. In order to reflect the message of the reading to live out the compassion of Christ we must ask ourselves two questions. Who do we avoid or in other words who are the "lepers" in our life? How do we act towards them?

We may separate ourselves from people whose religious beliefs are different than our own, from those whose bodies are ravaged by an illness, from those who speak with an accent or who look different than ourselves. What would the response of Jesus be? Jesus shows us be reaching out to the leper.

The embrace of Christ is without bounds. Jesus establishes the kingdom in the midst of outcasts. There is a message here for the contemporary church.

ONE WHO UNITES

In the second reading Paul clearly states that he is one who unites those with differing viewpoints. There is division between those in the community who believe it is alright to eat meat sacrificed to idols as the idols do not represent true gods. Others feel that eating meat sacrificed to idols is becoming one with the sacrifices offered to the idols. Paul feels one is free to eat meat sacrificed to idols and yet doesn't as he is concerned with unity and mutual respect. We are called to be a people who unite others within and outside of our community. One of the chief characteristics of our faith is not how we bring about division but instead how we bring people together.

DIOCESAN STEWARDSHIP APPEAL

This weekend the parishes of our diocese present the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal. I have a few ideas that I would like you to consider on this weekend. First of all our diocese has a new bishop. Bishop Duca brings a new vision to our diocese. I look enjoyed working with Bishop Duca. He is allowing our diocese to get a fresh start under his leadership.

One of the characteristics of our bishop is that he has attempted to visit all areas within our diocese. Bishop Duca has already visited our parish twice in less than one year.

In reading over the areas to which the money of the diocesan stewardship will be used it impresses me that much the ministry which is covered by the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal has benefited our parish. We give to the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal not so that our parish will be rewarded but that the diocese as a whole will benefit. But again the ministries which are covered by the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal have benefited our parish.

The Diocesan Stewardship Appeal helps cover the extensive cost of seminarian education. This past summer Matthew Long was placed in our parish. We keep Matthew in our prayers as he prepares for ordination.

The Diocesan Stewardship Appeal also provides our retired clergy with resources for medical care and living expenses. The Diocesan Stewardship Appeal helps both Msgr. Moore and Fr. Bob Inzina with those expenses.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society is an important ministry within our parish. Over an extended period of years the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal has assisted the Eastern Deanery St. Vincent de Paul Society.

The Diocesan Stewardship Appeal funds the Greco Institute. Our parish has invited speakers from Shreveport to visit our parish and teach Greco classes. This semester Dianne Rachel who is Director of the Office of Worship is teaching our Greco Class at JGS. This is another way in which the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal has directly helped our parish.

All Catholic families are able to receive a copy of the Catholic Connection, the official diocesan magazine in their homes. The Catholic Connection is funded through the Diocesan Stewardship Appeal.

I could continue but I will end here.

I invite the entire parish to give to the Diocesan Stewardship. The size of the donation is not as important as the fact that we worked together as a parish in helping the leadership of the Diocese in meeting its goals.

I have asked Joanne Crone to be the Appeal director for our parish this year. I would therefore like to call Joanne forward to speak about the Appeal.

SECURITY AND TRANSPARENCY

There have been security issues that have taken place in our community and even within our church grounds. Now, before I continue, I want to assure everyone that no one has broken into our church facilities nor has anything happened to one of our school children. But having said this it is important that I take steps to make our church facilities even safer.

I have two goals. The first is to ensure that individuals cannot freely flow from church facilities to the school facilities. Our school has a fence that keeps it very secure and yet a person can freely pass from our church facilities to our school facilities. This must change.

My second goal is that all who use our church facilities will be kept safe at all times.

The initials to meeting these goals will be through the locking of the doors of the church facilities from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. All individuals who want to use the church facilities will have to enter through the church office. I am pleased as pastor at the number of people who pray in the church during the day. I want this to continue. At the present time you will be asked to enter the church facilities through the office.

Soon a door will be placed in the link. The door will be placed between just past the bathrooms in the link which leads to the school courtyard. This door will separate our church facilities into two parts. As a result one will not be able to pass from the church facilities to the school facilities during the school day.

Finally, I have brought together a Safe Environment Committee that is chaired by Officer Glen Krammel. His committee will walk through the facilities and give me recommendations as to other ways that I can make our church and school facilities more secure.

If you have questions or concerns I invite you to speak to me and I will answer your concerns.