

Choosing the Right Action

February 14, 2021, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel of Mark 1:40-45

Fr. John

Most of us probably heard the old joke about: 'how many psychologists it takes to change a light bulb'. The answer is: only one - but the light bulb has to first WANT to change.

Well, what's true about the light bulb is certainly true about us. Wanting to change can hopefully move a person to actually making that change. It's the act of not only choosing but acting upon that choice that becomes crucial.

In the gospel reading for today, a man suffering from leprosy approached Jesus with the request: 'If you choose, you can make me clean'. To which, Jesus, replies: 'I do choose. Be made clean.'

We are sometimes overwhelmed with the vast variety of possible choices that confront us these days - everything from store purchases to life and vocational decisions. In the early days of mass automobile production - it was jokingly said that you could order a model T Ford in any colour - as long as it was black!

So while we can sometimes complain about not having a choice - we are at least spared with the confusion of having to make painstaking decisions.

The motivating factor in Jesus' decision to heal the man's leprosy was that of pity. But pity alone is not enough if it remains only a feeling of sympathy. However if it also MOVES to some action of relief or mercy then it takes on a deeper layer of authenticity.

Father Brendan McGuire stated in a recent reflection that there is a difference between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy sees us still disengaged as spectators from afar. Empathy, on the other hand, has us entering the situation in some way, in order to alleviate the cause of the pain. It's not just joining another in their suffering as if to say that misery enjoys company. Rather it's a constructive way of walking with someone through their suffering.

This is the story of God throughout all of humanity in all of the scriptures. Today's gospel reading is a good example of that wherein Jesus makes the decision to heal the leper and reached out to touch him. This was an action that not only held the danger of contaminating himself physically so that he could no longer go into a town openly but would ultimately make him a social leper to the religious establishment of his day.

These days, when the need for social distancing prevents us from physically engaging with others, we are finding different ways to walk with those who are suffering - perhaps more from loneliness and isolation. We have seen that in the many creative ways that

people have connected with elderly parents or grandparents in hospitals and long term care homes using music or electronic messaging devices.

While these cannot fully replace our physical, in-person presence to others, they are ways of reaching out. So perhaps we cannot bring about the kinds of physical cures which Jesus brought to others, but there is an inner healing that we can bring.

Seemingly small acts of kindness and compassion preceded by an awareness of what God calls us to do - which we call prayer, are not insignificant. It's up to us to make that choice.

And as it says in today's second reading from Corinthian: '... whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.'