

## FROM THE DESK OF **Fr. Julius**



Brothers and Sisters in Christ; Grace and peace!

This coming midweek we partake of Ash Wednesday, and as in ancient times, our heads will be *sprinkled* with holy ashes to usher in our hallowed Lenten season. In the ancient scriptures, these ashes were often combined with sackcloth to signify sins, and how both mark their ‘sting’ on our conscience. On this day we are all called to submit ourselves to the guidelines of the Lenten season, that our fasting may be pleasing to God, and that He strengthen us during our devotion.

The old law illustrated in the Book of Leviticus points to the rigorous prohibitions against exposure to a leper. At that time, it was thought that these diseases were a divine punishment for sin. Juxtapose this against Jesus’ tender desire to physically reach out and heal the leper in our Gospel. Instead of having to undergo Jewish ritual purification, the leper is not only healed and released, but Jesus our Lord continues in purity. Recall the humble St. Damien of Molokai and his work among lepers. Although he would eventually die from leprosy, he was able to vastly improve the lives of the lepers with water, food, and housing. This was all within the bounds of his spiritual missionary work. With the transformed call to holiness in the Second Reading, St. Paul exhorts us to do “everything for the glory of God; avoid giving offense, please everyone, and imitate me.”

We observe our Lord as he heals and liberates the leper...Is there not a parallel condition today as the shadow of the Covid – 19 virus hovers over us, how we have become like lepers to each other? No visits to ill family members, no close contact with our dear friends, hugs and handshakes are discouraged. How sorely we need Lent, and the cleansing and healing that Jesus provides: that we can be restored to new and perfect spiritual health, free from any leprosy of sins.

Therefore, this Gospel could be a direct call to tear down the walls that separate us from each other and build bridges of loving relationships. It is a clarion call to welcome those who may not look, think, or speak like us. It could also mean to welcome AIDS victims, alcoholics, drug addicts, and those marginalized by the society. Indeed, it is a call to re-examine the barriers we have created and approach God with a heart that is ready to welcome and accept ALL!

As Jesus told the leper, “go, show yourself to the priest,” the Church gives us opportunities daily by appointment in the Precious Sacrament of Penance – every Saturday, and soon Ash Wednesday (Feb. 17), the official beginning of fasting and abstinence, where we pray to be fortified by the act of self-denial.

Joyous Sunday!