

Meditation

In Jesus' day, leprosy meant not only incurable physical disintegration, but also social and cultural death. It was the supreme "plague" which God inflicted on sinners. It is under the image of a leper that Isaiah depicts the sinful people. It is under this same image that he describes a mysterious Servant who expiates Israel's sin. In this context, Jesus' face-to-face meeting with the leper takes on its full meaning. We see the unclean before the Holy One, the outcast before the Servant who will be cast out, the leper who is impure before the pure one who will be disfigured like a leper. It is the sinful world that the Saviour touches and purifies. The Messiah has arrived. In him, the banished of society, the living dead are restored. In different degrees, under different forms, leprosy still creates barriers between people. Today's lepers are the very ill forgotten in hospitals, the marginal poor shut up in unhealthy tenements, the addicts shunned by high-minded societies. Before all these lepers, we ourselves must take part in the simple story of the encounter between Jesus and the leper. For we too must recognize that we are all lepers. We must disclose the sins that we keep hidden. We must cry out in acknowledgement of our moral frailty. Thus we regain life and take our places in the community of the redeemed. *Once touched and healed, we can in turn proclaim the Word. Rejoicing in health regained, we can welcome the outcast and the rejected, acknowledged in their human dignity.*