

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—2018

The father of five children had won a toy at a raffle at work. He called his kids together to ask which one would be the most worthy to get the prize. So he asked, “Who is the most obedient? Who never talks back to mother? Who does everything she says?” The oldest of the five chimed, “Okay, dad, you get the toy.”

We hear at times people say, “No pun intended.” But I’m going to begin with “A pun intended,” when I say that the Gospel we just heard is a really a touching story. In the usual sense, it is a touching story of the exchange between Jesus and the leper. We hear the humble but confident words of the man with leprosy as he approaches Jesus and asks for healing. He already had some insight as to who this person was, otherwise he would not have dared approach him. As we heard in the first reading, those with leprosy had to stay at a distance from people and shout unclean in order that there might be no contact—it was the law. However, he knew that Jesus was more than just a person who made people better; somehow he knew that Jesus really cared. He knew that in Jesus’ eyes see he was more than a leper, that he was a man with leprosy, a human being who needed help. Notice what Jesus did. Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched him. This simple act was truly remarkable. No one dared at that time to touch a person with leprosy.

As we know, someone with leprosy had to live apart from everyone. So it’s likely that this man had gone for many years without the simplest human contact. Think about that, years without a touch. All of us, young or old, need for physical warmth. Jesus could have healed this man with leprosy simply by speaking to him, but he reached out and touched him too. Jesus knew, aside from the physical healing that he needed to be touched.

Jesus knew and knows what people need. Jesus dealt with other people in other ways. Remember the blind man upon whose eyes Jesus applied the moist clay. Others received what they needed by the spoken word. To a paralyzed man, Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven.” Some suggest that this man’s paralysis may have resulted from a sinful lifestyle. Maybe he needed to have those sins forgiven before he could be fully restored to wholeness. Christ ministers to each of us in our own way.

Getting ready for today, I came across a true story about a woman named Alicia Sferrino. Alicia was just twenty years old when she was diagnosed with severe kidney failure. Although dialysis would help for a while, doctors made it clear to Alicia’s family that she would die without a kidney transplant from someone close to her who shared the same genetic profile. Like any loving parents, Deanne and Vincent Sferrino would have gladly given a vital organ to save their precious daughter. But they couldn’t. Alicia was adopted, and they had no idea who her real parents were.

So the family began to for Alicia’s birth mother. All they had was her name, Ruth Chiasson, and the

state in which she gave birth. After making numerous telephone calls to this town, they learned that Ruth had married, and now her last name was Foisy. But they couldn't find a Foisy anywhere. Finally, Deanne and Vincent tracked down the priest who had married Ruth and her husband. He agreed to send her a letter from the Sferrino's.

When Ruth Foisy first opened the Sferrino's letter, she was stunned. At seventeen, she had become pregnant and given birth to a baby girl. Her parents pressured her to give the baby away. Ruth had never gotten over the heartbreak and guilt of that act, and for twenty years she had burned a candle on the date of Alicia's birth. Now, the child she had given life to needed her to give that gift a second time. Ruth knew what she would do.

It wasn't easy for Ruth to tell her children around that they had a half-sister they never knew. It wasn't easy to relive the story of giving away her baby for adoption. But when she was finished, Ruth's children gave their support to her all the way.

Ruth went through with the donation of one of her kidneys, and today both women are doing well. Alicia Sferrino is healthy, her new kidney functioning fine. She is married now, and the mother of a baby daughter herself. In a time of physical and emotional crisis, these two women gave each other a special gift. Ruth gave Alicia life; Alicia gave Ruth the forgiveness she sought for so long.

Sometimes things are not always what they seem. Why is that at times good people suffer and bad people go through life untouched? However, through the eyes of our faith, we know and can see that God grants to each of us what we need when we approach him and ask for his help. We know and can see with the eyes of hearts that there is an unseen hand at work in our lives. And somehow, eventually, for those who love God and believe, life works out for the good.

Along with knowing that Jesus knows *what* we need, he is always willing to *meet* our needs. The man with leprosy came to Jesus and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I do will it." he said. "Be made clean!" Those are powerful words, "I do will it." Jesus is willing to heal *our* every hurt. Jesus is willing to take away *our* sins. Jesus is willing to grant each of us a meaningful life with an untouchable hope, joy, and peace. Christ is willing to do for us everything we truly need. But, like the man who was healed, we have to ask for what we need. And that's the way God works, according to our *needs*, not necessary according to what we *want*. Part of that asking, on our part is to truly believe in God and his love for us. With that, we are able to trust God in all things, allowing us to experience life and love in all its fullness, once again giving a real purpose and meaning to our lives even in the trials and difficulties that life might throw at us. We will come to truly believe that we are meant to be here and there is so much more to life than what we can see with our eyes and so much more that awaits us when God calls us home.