



World Leprosy Day

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To increase awareness to the physically and socially destructive chronic infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium leprae*, commonly known as Leprosy or Hansen's disease, the French philanthropist and writer Raoul Follereau, in 1954, proposed that the last Sunday of January should be internationally set aside and designated as **World Leprosy Day**. Leprosy has long been considered a dreaded disease and victims became social outcasts. Fortunately for the victims, a sense of Christian obligation saw philanthropic-minded individuals taking action to support these social outcasts. The first known leprosaria were founded in the fourth century in Rome and in the Holy Land [Caesarea and Jerusalem]. The Jerusalem establishment, with the ups and downs brought about by the political turmoil experienced by that city, eventually saw the establishment of a brethren community of St Lazarus of Bethany serving the victims.

The traditional links of the Order of St. Lazarus with victims of Hansen's disease have come down through the millennia. Fortunately, in the 1970s a formal curative antibiotic regimen was described leading to the eradication of the disease from the developed world. However, leprosy is still a strife in under-developed countries where victims are still victimized and socially isolated. Around 150,000 new cases are diagnosed annually many already in an advanced stage of the disease. Around 9,000 cases involve children below the age of 15 years. Because of the disappearance of the disease from developed world communities, the modern Order has slowly distanced itself from supporting victims of this infection to support more pressing needs in their communities, particularly the chronic sick and elderly. During the 2022, only 2.7% of the total philanthropic donations made by the Order targeted victims of leprosy. We should, however, as a Lazarite community, make a special effort to remember these unfortunates on this special day. We do need to strive to bring to the world's attention to the plight of the unfortunate victims of this destructive infection, a plight that today is more the result of stigma and social isolation.

I would therefore encourage all members and national jurisdictions to get together to commemorate this special day:

1. Each jurisdiction should encourage its members to **"Light a Light for Lepers"** while mediating on the special relationship Jesus Christ had with these unfortunates [see Meditation exercise below]. This event can be formally organized by the jurisdiction or alternatively done on a personal individual/family/friends level. Of course, it would be nice for those participating to inform the Grand Hospitaller of their participation in this hopefully global activity. Let us use the



modern media facilities and post a photo of the event on the International Facebook page of the Order.

2. A second proposal is that the various jurisdictions should organize a fund-raising event dedicated towards a project that aims specifically to ameliorate the suffering of the victims of Hansen's Disease – this project can be one close to the heart of the jurisdiction concerned [there are many jurisdictions that regularly support the fight against leprosy], or alternatively any collected funds from this activity can be directed to support the Leprosy Hospital managed by Dr R. Rousselot, Bubaneswar in India [a project of the Office of the Grand Hospitaller ongoing since 2012].



*Light a light
for me*

- I am shunned
- I am emarginated
- I am doomed

Give me hope

WORLD LEPROSY DAY
Our common humanity

Spiritual Meditation - Jesus and the Lepers

Very Reverend Fr. Joseph Cini FSC, SChLJ



This prayer moment can be done privately, or in a group. This exercise starts with the lighting of the “Leprosy Day Candle”.

The gospel passage is chosen from St. Mark’s Gospel because the mass readings for this liturgical year are taken from his gospel. The gospel passage should be read once; then a second time, more slowly. After that, the points for reflection should be read and meditated in silence for a brief moment.

✠ **A reading from the gospel of St. Mark, Chapter 1, verses 40-45** (New International Version)

⁴⁰ A man with leprosy^[a] came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” ⁴¹ Jesus was indignant.^[b] He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

⁴³ Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: ⁴⁴ “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” ⁴⁵ Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Footnotes.

Mark 1:40 The Greek word traditionally translated *leprosy* was used for various diseases affecting the skin.

Mark 1:41 Many manuscripts, instead, translate as: *Jesus was filled with compassion*

✝ **Points for reflection.** <https://truthappliedjs.com/mark-140-45-jesus-heals-a-leper-part-2/>

There are two figures we need to focus upon: the leper and the Lord.

From the leper we learn:

We come to Jesus just as we are. Just like the leper who came to Jesus full of leprosy, we can come to Jesus with our bad habits, doubts, anxiety, anger...

We come to Jesus with desperation. Just like the leper who approached Jesus knowing that Jesus was his last hope, we come to Jesus knowing He is our only hope.

We come to Jesus with humility. Just like the leper who knelt before Jesus, we lay our lives before Jesus acknowledging that He is Lord.

We come to Jesus with respect. Just like the leper who said, “If you are willing...” indicating that Jesus was in charge and believing Jesus could do something for him. We also come to Jesus with similar respect.

We come to Jesus with confidence. Just like the leper who knew Jesus could heal him and cleanse him, we come to Jesus knowing He can help, heal and free us.

From Jesus we learn:

Jesus cares. Jesus was “**moved with compassion**” toward this man. Jesus empathised with this man’s horrible condition, the agony of his isolation and his distress. Compassion moved Him to take action. Jesus is a compassionate Lord.

Jesus identifies. Ever since this man had been diagnosed with leprosy, no one had touched him. Yet, in a moment of total vulnerability, Jesus was identifying with the leper by touching him: in reality Jesus was symbolically passing His power to him.

Jesus heals. When Jesus reached out and touched the **man was healed: “healed”** in the ceremonial sense, “**healed” in the** medical understanding of the word, and ready to be restored to the community and society.

✝ **Our Part.**

As followers of Jesus:

We must follow **the path of compassion** towards those who are hurting, who are afraid, or worried. “As God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, **put on compassion,** kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and forgiving one another” (Col. 3: 12-13).

We will have **to empathise** with people, identify with their pain, touch their lives letting them know, “I love you just like you are and I am here to help you.”

We believe that **when Jesus is allowed** to touch a life, He literally changes it into “a new creature” by His amazing power (2 Cor. 5:17). He cleanses from sin, He heals the fears, the worries, anxieties and doubts. He gives a new heart, new hope, new mind, and new direction and purpose in life. **Jesus heals!**