

# Reflections

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## The Lepers

The New Testament speaks of the healing of lepers. Leprosy was (and continues to be) a dreadful disease because it excluded communion with the people of God. The leper, in addition to being a “punishment of God,” was a sick person from whom one had to flee in the name of the law and hygiene.

The book of Leviticus presents us with a significant part of the meticulous measures it contains, with the intention of avoiding whatever contact with the leper. The leper has to live outside the camp, and later, outside the city.

Leprosy was the most appropriate image for all that was “impure,” both from the moral and religious points of view. A relationship with a leper “soiled,” just as contact with a cadaver. Therefore, the leper was considered a dead person, and a healing was taken as a true resurrection.

It is sad to verify how in a community – almost always – the easier road to take is that of rejection when facing a strange element which is bothersome, problematic, and representing a threat to tranquility – instead of responding with love and confidence and choosing the way of dialogue and patience.

Frequently, the disciplinary plan results much more developed and sophisticated than the code for mercy and evangelical forgiveness. Legality is more important than fraternity and even more so than humanity.

Among all impositions, the cruelest was that which obligated the leper to “proclaim” his impurity: “He will go ragged and uncombed, with chin covered and shouting out: Impure, impure!” He has the obligation to warn others of his social danger, to place them on guard against the “infected” person, to invite them to remain at a distance.

It is about a perfect mechanism so the poor unfortunate one can be aware that he is sick because of a personal fault. To this logic of egotism, opposed is the logic of Jesus. It does not recommend to the leper “it is justifiable that you accept the dishonorable condition for reasons of public health and for the salvation of the soul.”

Instead he is told: “I desire, be clean.” He is not exhorted “have patience, bear it,” instead he is made to understand: I do not accept, I cannot bear that they continue treating you in this way, that you bear this shameful discrimination.

Jesus challenges the contamination, He does not avoid contact with the impure one. He does not doubt infringing the rule, breaking the sanitary code, causing the mechanism of exclusion to leap.

In the entire Gospel, Jesus appears as one who suppresses the boundaries, breaks the walls of separation, forgoing prejudices, does not accept racial or religious discrimination. In the eyes of Christ, only the man without adjectives exists; the man with whom to establish a relationship, a friendship, an exchange.

And we? If we had the courage to see the face of reality, we would fall into the reckoning that perhaps there are many “lepers” we maintain at a distance.

It is hard for us to accept and embrace the “lepers” who are at our side, those we “convert” into lepers.....those who do not share our ideas, those we do not find likable, those who seem bored or inopportune, those who bother us with their problems, those who bother us with their misfortunes, those who do not respect our plans, those who interrupt us putting in question our comfort and our privileges.

How do we treat others? Let us ask Jesus to give us the grace to open more our heart to the brothers and sisters who are near us and who need our support, understanding and love.

## Questions for reflection

1. Could it not be that we also defend our private camp?
2. Do we hold some outside our tent?
3. How do I treat those who are “different?”

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