

**Homily Outline for the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year – Cycle B**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**  
**February 14, 2021**

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**Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

- I. About a year ago at this time, few of us knew the fear of touching or being touched by an unclean person until the onset of the coronavirus in early 2020.
  - A. One moment we were all willing to be herded into buses, planes or crowded movie theaters or restaurants together, sharing sitting and breathing spaces, up close and personal.
  - B. Then almost overnight, it seemed, other people became a dangerous enemy, potential disease-carriers, killers unawares.
  - C. New concepts came into common vocabulary like social distancing, and in the lockdown that followed, we sheltered in homes that became fortresses, wary of coming too close to one another, with the safe distance marked out in supermarket lines and other places of unavoidable contact.
  
- II. Perhaps in light of the experience of the past year, we now hear today's first reading from the Book of Leviticus with greater appreciation.
  - A. People feared the contagious skin disease of leprosy; strict rules were established to prevent spreading the disease.
  - B. These fears would have been familiar in Jesus' time, when contact with a person who had a skin disease meant inevitable contamination, either physical or ritual.
  - C. The diseased other was a person of dread and fear in an era with few reliable medical remedies. You stayed clean or you died, simple as that.
    1. Leprosy was a skin disease that you could see.
    2. The coronavirus is an invisible intruder, which has made it so much more fearful for many people.
  
- III. There is another invisible and very contagious affliction that we should fear even more than COVID, namely, SIN.

- A. The Fathers of the Church often referred to leprosy as an image for sin.
1. We sin in thoughts, words, and deeds.
  2. Some sins, like hatred or entertaining impure thoughts, are invisible to the outside observer.
  3. Other sins, like hurtful words, can be heard when spoken and can be seen in print.
  4. Many sins can be seen, like violence and the consequences of greed and lust.
- B. We should respond to the threat of sin, which we call temptation, with similar aversion and take proper precautions.
1. We should want to get as far away from sin and sinful situations as possible.
  2. We call that avoiding the near occasion of sin.
- IV. Just as Jesus healed the man physically sick with leprosy, Jesus heals us from the spiritual sickness of sin.
- A. Jesus has also given us a wonderful sacrament where we can be healed of our sinfulness in the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation.
- B. We begin Lent this week on Ash Wednesday.
1. The focus of Lent should be on turning away from sin.
  2. If you have not been to confession in a while, may I suggest that you resolve to confess your sins sometime during the next few weeks leading up to Easter.
  3. We have plenty of opportunities here at the Cathedral:
    - Monday through Friday from 4:15 to 5:00 PM
    - Saturday from 9:00 AM to 10:00 AM and 2:30 to 3:30 PM
    - Sunday from 4:00 to 4:45 PM
  4. One of the main reasons why we have four priests assigned here at the Cathedral is to make the Sacrament of Penance readily available on a daily basis. This is a real blessing, and you should take advantage of it!
- C. Just as Jesus was eager to heal the leper of his leprosy, Jesus is eager to forgive us and heal us of our sins. Like the leper in today's Gospel, all we have to do is ask!
- V. May God give us this grace. Amen.