Homily for 6th Sunday 2015
February 15, 2015
Readings: Lv. 13.1-46, Ps. 32, 1 Cor. 10.31-11.1, Mk. 1.40-45
Place: Alumni Chapel @ NU, 7pm
Theme: Purpose and plan for Lent
Emotion: Reflective and hopeful

What do you wish to be healed of morally and spiritually? ... Jesus wishes to heal you, and has the power to heal you. Go to him. Notice in the gospels that Jesus heals people who seek him.

Today’s first and third readings present the story of people afflicted with leprosy. Throughout human history, millions of people have suffered from this disease. Until recently, people with leprosy were viewed as “unclean.” Since people thought leprosy was highly contagious, the suffering people physically had to separate themselves from the community, shave their heads, tear their garments, and while ringing a bell, warn people by declaring, “Unclean, unclean.” In Jesus’ time, “a leper came to Jesus and kneeling down begged him and said, ‘If you wish, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched [the leper], and said to him, ‘I do will it. Be made clean.’”

Jesus’ three dozen miracles demonstrate that he has power over the physical world. The more important point however, in that these physical miracles signify that Jesus has power over the spiritual world. So I repeat my introductory statement, “What do you wish to be healed of morally and spiritually? ... Jesus wishes to heal you, and he has the power to heal you. Go to him.”

This week on Ash Wednesday, we will start the 40 days of Lent. Forty days because we wish to identify with Jesus’ 40 days of being in the wilderness in preparation for his public ministry, in preparation for doing God the Father’s will.

Campus Ministry has prepared handouts for you, some of which will be distributed in today’s bulletin, and most of which will be distributed on Ash Wednesday.

These blue bookmarks highlight the theme of Lent: “presence, prayer and practice.” We all want to be present to God, to pour out our hearts to God so that he would listen to us, and that he might speak to us, inspire us, encourage us. To achieve this, our mind, heart and soul need to present themselves to God. This past week, I was approaching on the sidewalk one of our students. About six feet in front of her, I smiled and said, “Hi.” She said nothing. She heard nothing. She was wearing ear phones. I advanced to about two feet in front of her, smiled and repeated myself, “Hi.” She said nothing. She heard nothing. Like everybody, if you want God to speak to you, you need to be silent, attentive, available, open. Put down the headphones, turn off the games. As the Psalmist says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” God desires to be present to you, 24-7. How might you be silent, in order to be more present to God?
Prayer. Prayer has many forms. In Latin, the words are oratio, lectio, meditatio and contemplatio. You recognize various cognates. In English, oratio means formal prayer, e.g., the Our Father, Hail Mary, the Nicene Creed and many others. The word lectio means readings, e.g., reading the Scriptures, the lives of the saints, and spiritual reading. Meditatio pertains to mental prayer. Contemplatio refers to contemplation, in which the person places himself before God as in Eucharistic Adoration, and simply rests in God's presence.

Practice. May I suggest that this Lent you do something constructive, and make some sacrifice. could you try to pray more? ... All good things begin with prayer. 1) Do you come to Mass every Sunday? 2) Daily Mass? One day a week, could you come to the 12:15pm Mass; it lasts 22 minutes, not one hour. 3) What could you do for private prayer? Personally, when I wake up each morning, I lie in bed for an extra 15 minutes, and pray one Our Father and one Hail Mary for five individuals and five groups of people whom I name who might need prayers that day. 4) Saying grace before meals. One time, after golfing, I stopped in at Olive Garden, sat down at the bar, ordered a drink and a meal. When the meal arrived, I blessed myself, said grace, and started to eat. The bartender came over, and said, “Excuse me, some friends and I have a bet. Some of us are betting that you are either a Catholic priest or a Catholic high school teacher?” I replied, “Catholic priest!” The bartender said, “Great. I win the bet, and you get your drink for free!” People observe what we do and how we do it. Sacrifice? Can you sacrifice in some dietary way: giving up sweets or beer? At the priests’ residence the cook keeps at the entrance to the kitchen a bowl of multicolored M&Ms. As I walk in and out of the kitchen, I mindlessly reach in and take two M&Ms. Each Lent, I try not to take those M&M’s. It is so silly but it is so difficult to make even a small sacrifice, which had become a habit.

Getting back to where we started: “What do you wish to be healed of morally and spiritually? Present this need to God. Pray that Jesus will help to heal you. Practice prayer and sacrifice so that you might open yourself to receive, experience and enjoy Jesus’ healing graces. You will not likely be canonized a saint at the end of Lent’s 40 days, but you likely will have drawn closer to God. This takes effort. A popular bank used to advertise, “Wishing won’t do, saving will.” Applied to the moral and spiritual life, “wishing won’t do it, making the effort will.” All good students and athletes know this principle, “if you will the end-result, you must will the means.” If you want to get an “A”, you have to study and complete assignments. If you want to improve your physical shape, you have to work out in the exercise room. If you want to come closer to God in your moral and spiritual life, you have to present yourself to God, pray to God, and practice doing God’s will.

What do you wish to be healed of? ... Jesus wishes to heal you, and has the power to heal you. Go to him.”