

[Spirituality](#)



The remains of a crucifix from a church in Bojaya, Colombia, are seen during a national reconciliation prayer meeting at Las Malocas Park in Villavicencio, Colombia, Sept. 8, 2017. Jesus' arms and legs were blown off in 2002 when an improvised homemade mortar launched by rebels crashed through the roof of a church and exploded. (CNS/Paul Haring)



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To reflect on today's Scriptures, I think it's important once more to remind ourselves of the sequence of our readings since [we began this Ordinary Time of the year](#) a few Sundays ago. Jesus began his public life with the proclamation, "The reign of God is at hand. Change your lives," calling us to profound, extraordinary conversion. Then Jesus began to call disciples, formed the small community that became his followers, and began to preach, heal, and then also to overcome evil by driving out demons, transforming sinful or hateful evil situations into situations of goodness and love.

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Feb. 11, 2018](#)

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46

Psalms 32

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1

Mark 1:40-45

Now today in the Gospel, once more we find Jesus showing compassion and love, this time for a leper. Our first lesson today puts this Gospel in a context because in that lesson from the book of Leviticus we find the Jewish laws about leprosy and what the leper must do and how the leper is to be pushed out of the community, forbidden to be any part of the community, off by himself or herself and just separated because they're unclean.

The book of Leviticus explains that if someone touches a leper, that person becomes unclean, and the consequence of that were that you could no longer participate in the temple services. You were unclean; you could not come into the temple and participate. But notice what Jesus does: first of all, he, as Mark says, is overcome with compassion. He has a deep sense of the pain, the hurt, the isolation, the

loneliness, the hopelessness of this leper. When the man says, "If you wish, you could make me clean." Jesus says, "Yes, of course, I do want that."

He touches the man, going against that Levitical law, the Jewish law because reaching out in healing and love is more important than a human law. So Jesus in this instance is showing us once more that we drive out demons; we overcome evil by doing good, by transforming what is sinful or evil into something that is good, beautiful, and loving. The message for us could not be clearer as Paul says in our second lesson today: "Follow my example as I follow the example of Jesus." We too must try to overcome evil in our world by following Jesus in doing good.

This particular Gospel lesson, I think, is especially timely on this weekend, where Jesus is giving this example that loving another is more important than any human law so even by touching that leper, showing love and compassion, Jesus through that love and compassion transforms, changes an evil situation into something good. In our world there are so many divisions, so many ways in which we are divided from one another. We put up barriers to separate groups from one another, separate ourselves from those we call our enemies.

We, in this way, bring great hurt into our human society. It can be within our family life. It can be within our community, where we set up divisions and barriers between people of different races or economic class. Or it can be in the international community. Right now we're engaged in a situation with North Korea where we think of them as enemies and we threaten to use all unlimited fire and fury to destroy North Korea, unless they do what we demand: stop building nuclear weapons, even though in the budget that was just presented to the Congress and approved by the president, we ourselves are increasing by billions of dollars our expenditures on the development and improvement of the nuclear arsenal that we have and that we intend to use when we decide it's necessary.

We say "no" to them and it's caused a time of great danger for the world. But what happened this weekend when the Olympic Games started? The South part of Korea has been divided from the North since the 1950s, and there's been ever-greater hostility building up. But now with the Olympic Games, the North has made a combined team with the South and they're competing together; they march together with one flag made especially for the occasion, bringing unity out of this harsh division.

Now the president of South Korea has accepted an invitation to visit North Korea. It's very slight but it's the beginnings of what could be reconciliation, what could be bringing peace to that area, ending a conflict that goes back to the 1950s, making the nation one. It will be a long, difficult journey to make this happen, but it has to start with this first step. The leaders of the two countries have committed themselves to make that first step. Is that not a clear example of trying to transform an evil situation into something good? It's exactly what Jesus is calling us to do when we confront evil, to transform that evil into good, to overcome it by transforming it.

Early in the Gospel of Mathew when Jesus begins his public life (and we're all familiar with this), he preaches what we have come to call the Sermon on the Mount. At one point in that sermon, he's talking about the importance of reconciliation, coming together after a split, after anger, after hatred, after violence and reconciling. At one point in that long sermon Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said of old, 'Thou shalt not kill,' but I say to you that you must not even be angry with your brother or sister."

Then Jesus goes on further, "Even if you are bringing your gift to the altar, you're coming to worship God, and there you remember your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar, go first and be reconciled. Only then come back and offer your gift." After reconciling with your brother or sister, only then come and worship, offer your gift. That's the lesson that perhaps is beginning to take hold, acting out on that teaching of Jesus.

It's beginning to take hold between the two Koreas. We must pray that it goes further, that it slowly builds into a true reconciliation. Our own nation has a responsibility to try to share in making that happen. It's wrong to threaten to destroy a nation like North Korea or any nation, but to make reconciliation happen would be following the example of Jesus, bringing healing, forgiveness and love into a situation of violence and hatred.

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Today as we celebrate this Eucharist and we hear the words of Jesus and see his example of reaching out to touch the outcast, the person split apart, drawing that person in, as we hear this example of Jesus, I pray that all of us will begin to try to form the same attitude that we try to become more like Jesus, be converted, follow

his example, and change situations of hatred and violence into situations of love and goodness.

In our Eucharistic prayer we will pray in a short time these words, and I ask you to listen to them and pray them with fervor: "God inspire in us words and actions to comfort those who labor and are burdened. Help us to serve them truly after the example of Jesus and at his command." Today we pray that we will serve others through reconciliation, following the example of Jesus and responding to his command: "Love one another as I have loved you."

[Homily given Jan. 14, 2018, at St. Philomena, Detroit, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]