

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Weekday Mass – Friday, January 8, 2021
Cycle B

With the height of this pandemic the phrase “social distancing” became a byword. With that phrase, jokes abound. It is said that before Covid-19, when you sneeze, people smile, turn to you and say, “Bless you!” With Covid-19 when you sneeze, people run away and say “What’s wrong with you?”

While social distancing connotes aloofness and negativity, we understood that it is actually an act of charity. With social distancing I distance myself not because I despise you. I distance myself because I presume I am a carrier and I might unknowingly infect you. Thus, the deliberate social distancing.

In today’s Gospel, we hear of Jesus healing a man with leprosy. In biblical times, we discover that social distancing was also practiced but of a different kind. If you want to know how the ancient world of the Bible treats people and looks upon people with leprosy, read Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46 and you will no doubt feel what a leper in those times most likely felt – as good as dead.

A leper is rejected, isolated, stripped of his rights to community and barred from being a member of humanity. Ancient people did not have the means yet to understand and cure the disease. And so we understand the fear of leprosy, and with this, the reason behind the extreme law of social distancing.

The leper called out to Jesus. Jesus reached out to him, touched him and made him well. This was not only a display of power. Jesus taught them and us that social distancing need not mean we become socially distant to one another. Indeed, we can be socially distant to one another, like when we hoard goods to the neglect of others, when public servants put themselves first in times of emergencies, when we bash one another in social media and spread fear and unfounded rumors and when we become selfish and forget our true purpose as Christians.

Amen