

# SUNDAY PLUS

Basic needs

## Dare to be different

by Mary Bell

In Jesus' time having leprosy was like being sentenced to a living death. Even today it continues to carry a great stigma. Workers for LEPRO, the society which raises funding and awareness of the problems of the disease world-wide, describes how a family will often hide sufferers away even when they have been treated successfully because fear of the disease causes them to be ostracised in their communities. The shame contaminates the whole family.

To be an outcast is to be lonely, shunned and rejected.

By touching the leper as he did Jesus was defying the taboos of his society. His compassion for the man was total: he was willing not only to cleanse him of the disease

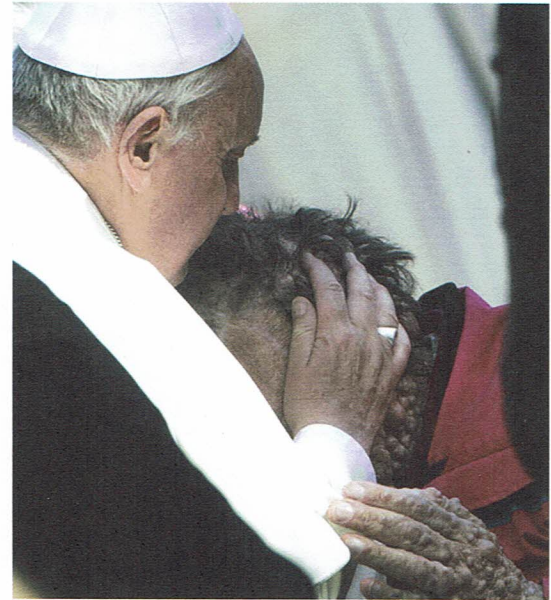
but also to welcome him back as a member of the human race, to restore his standing in the community. This is such a human story. Of course the man couldn't keep his good fortune a secret; everybody heard about the miraculous healing with the result that Jesus had to go into hiding.

Social rejection is equivalent to having leprosy. In a world where images are of paramount importance the outcasts are legion: anybody who is different for whatever reason can be targeted. Social media like Facebook and Twitter have increased the problem.

St Paul writes, "I just try to be helpful to everyone at all times."

Are we also willing to stand up for the odd ones out and defy public censure? Do we have the courage to follow Jesus' example?

*Mary Bell is a grandmother and a retired teacher who continues to use her skills in the University of the Third Age.*



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## Live life to the full

by Jo Siedlecka

God wants us to live our lives fully - but a disease like leprosy must have felt like a half-life. Besides the pain and disability, sufferers were shunned and lived in desperate poverty. To touch a leper made one ritually unclean. Jesus responded to the leper's desperate appeal immediately - touching and healing him - giving him the freedom to be fully human again. Who are the people in need whom we avoid in today's society? The unemployed, the homeless, the refugees, the elderly, maybe? But also - those less visible - that single mum who lives down the road or the stressed-out colleague perhaps? A smile, an enquiry, simple recognition can change someone's day. And what about my own weaknesses that really need God's healing touch? Do I ask

for help? And if things work out, do I show gratitude? Or do I simply forget and move on?

*Jo Siedlecka is a Catholic journalist and runs the website Independent Catholic News, www.indcatholicnews.com*

“**Bernadette, poor, illiterate and ill, felt that Mary was looking at her as a person. The lovely lady spoke to her with great respect and without condescension. This reminds us that every person is, and always remains, a human being, and is to be treated as such.**

Pope Francis

## The miracle of Lourdes

by Dr Philip Alton

Lazarus is dead. When talking about miracles, this is important to remember. The new life miraculously bestowed on him was not a permanent transformation, but instead foreshadowed Christ the life - and the permanent transformation which we hope to obtain through him.

Lourdes is an incredible place: steeped in miraculous healings and physical transformation, it foreshadows, like Lazarus, our eternal future. But even those healed in this particular way will still grow old. So, perhaps, the truer miracle is the transformation of hearts, as we grow closer to Christ - at Lourdes, especially, as we forget ourselves, and walk with others in their suffering.

Lourdes creates a special

opportunity for us to ask Our Lord to cleanse us, and to open our hearts, share our crosses and follow him. This palpable atmosphere miraculously enables that permanent transformation to take further hold of us and moulds us more into the likeness of God.

*In practising medicine, Dr Philip Alton plays an active part in bringing healing to his patients.*

**Lord of life, watch over, protect and bless all those who are sick. Guide the hands of their carers to fill them with your hope and comfort. Bless carers and reward them for the help, support and understanding that they give so generously. Amen.**

Today:  
Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46  
1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1  
Mark 1:40-45

Monday:  
James 1:1-11  
Mark 8:11-13

Tuesday:  
James 1:12-18  
Mark 8:14-21

Wednesday:  
Joel 2:12-18  
2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2  
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Thursday:  
Deuteronomy 30:15-20  
Luke 9:22-25

Friday:  
Isaiah 58:1-9  
Matthew 9:14-15

Saturday:  
Isaiah 58:9-14  
Luke 5:27-32

Next Sunday:  
Genesis 9:8-15  
1 Peter 3:18-22  
Mark 1:12-15