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-- As most of you know, this winter we are in the middle of a pretty severe flu season. The main strain of flu is more resistant to the flu shot than usual. Luckily, I've not been hit yet (and I did have my shot).

-- I suppose it's a good time of year to hear this gospel about Jesus' cure of a leper, just as we heard a gospel about Jesus' many healings last week. Jesus showed a lot of care for the sick, and he felt their pain in his gut, so to speak.

-- When he confronted this leper, he not only was dealing with sickness but with social exclusion. As the first reading explains, people with those skin diseases lumped under the term leprosy at the time had to live apart from the community. And, in those days, that was as good as being dead.

-- But one leper had the courage and daring to approach Jesus. Jesus didn't step back, as most people would have. He touched the man which, in effect, made him unclean for a time. And the man was healed.

-- We may look on the people of Jesus' time and consider them backward for their lack of medical knowledge. But our modern society has ways of excluding people for conditions which they have little or no control over.

-- For instance, we still can't seem to come to an agreement over how to treat the so-called Dreamers, who came undocumented to our country as children. They've become pawns in a political struggle rather than people who need attention. One of them was even recently ordained a priest in Atlanta and now serves at their cathedral.

-- And we can add to that people who suffer from AIDS, homosexuals, the mentally ill, and countless others. We are called to treat them with human respect, as Jesus treated the outcasts of his day with care.

-- But there is another important lesson in this gospel. There is a sense in which we are all like that leper, in need of healing. None of us is in complete harmony with God. At times we may be seriously distant from God. We call this condition sin.

-- So it's appropriate as well that this gospel comes the Sunday before we begin the season of Lent. For this is a time when we seek healing from our sinfulness and strive to turn around our lives through prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

-- It's also a good time to seek healing in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For our personal sin doesn't just affect us—it affects the community around us.

-- Just as leprosy affected the community in Jesus' day, so sin affects us today. Just as Jesus asked the man who was healed to present himself to the priest to declare him clean, we present ourselves to the priest to be assured of God's healing for our sins.

-- Jesus desires healing for all of God's people. We must desire it for ourselves as well. For we are all free to accept or reject God's invitation to healing.

-- May we seek God's healing: personally, from our loved ones, and from the Church community through the sacraments.

-- Then we will be ready to be God's healing instruments in the world we live in every day.