

## SIXTH SUNDAY IN OT - B

In last Sunday's Gospel when Jesus visits the home of Simon and Andrew the first thing the brothers do is to tell Jesus about Simon's sick mother-in-law whom he heals.

After spending the day healing many people Jesus goes off alone to devote time in prayer.

Two lessons can be gleaned from this account:

1. In prayer we should always tell Jesus about those who are sick as well as any other need we might have.
2. If Jesus needed to take time out to pray then so do we.

In today's Gospel the leper teaches us something else about prayer when he says to Jesus, "If you wish, you can make me clean."

When praying we need to be humble, not demanding.

And, as we pray in the "Our Father," our ultimate petition should be "Thy will be done ... and give me the faith I need to accept your will."

In prayer we're not twist God's arm; rather, we are surrendering ourselves into his hands.

It's not easy to pray with this kind of trust, but we can if we believe that God really loves us.

It has been said that Jesus is God's Valentine to us.

In John 3:16 we read: "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, not condemn the world but to save it."

This Valentine's Day [weekend] can also teach us something about prayer.

The best gift we can give to someone we love is to just be with them ... to spend time with them.

And that's what prayer is all about.

As we prepare for Lent which begins this week on Ash Wednesday, hopefully we have some kind of plan regarding the disciplines of prayer, penance, and almsgiving.

I spoke about penance two weeks ago (when we had the snowstorm).

I said that our penances are not punishments as much as they should remind us of our need for God.

By giving up something we learn that all we really need is God.

The hunger created by our fasting and abstinence reminds us that God alone can satisfy the deepest hunger of our hearts.

Regarding prayer, I go back to the idea that the best gift we can give to someone we love is to spend time with them.

Think of prayer as going on a "date" with Jesus.

We don't have to be saying "prayers" the whole time, we can also just talk to Jesus about our life.

True friends can also spend time in silence with each other.

We need to take time to listen to Jesus speak to our heart.

Finally, when it comes to almsgiving, we can begin with the Rice Bowls to collect money for the poor and hungry.

Throwing in spare change is great for children, but anyone older than a child should consider making a special tithe.

I suggest that we might consider giving one-tenth of the money we spend on groceries each month to the Rice Bowl collection.

Perhaps we can make a special gift to the parish at the conclusion of Lent for Easter.

And there are many charities worthy of our generosity.

Even helping out a struggling family member, friend, or neighbor could be the form our almsgiving takes this year.

St. Paul challenges us today to "do everything for the glory of God." That is a great measure of our plans for Lent.

And Paul invites us to imitate him as he imitates Christ.

That's really the goal of Lent: To become more like Jesus and to imitate his total self-gift for the sake of our salvation.

Jesus is God's Valentine to us. He is the assurance that we are loved and that we are saved.

Lent is the perfect time to return that love to God through Jesus in our prayer, our penance, and our almsgiving.