

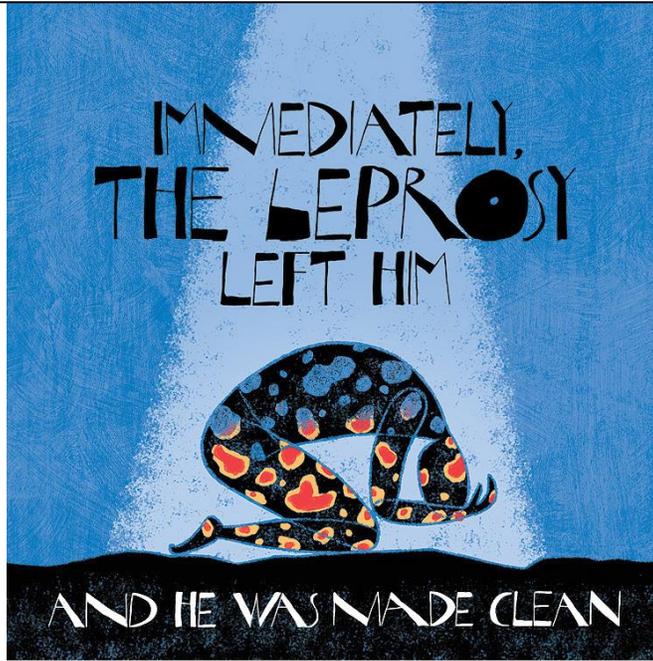
*A great prophet has arisen in our midst, God has visited his people.*

We have a Gospel reading that is challenging. Last week, we heard the Lord say that we are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. We aren't light to the world if we say, "Well, I don't murder people, I don't commit adultery, I don't perjure myself." Most people on earth do not murder, commit adultery or perjury. The Lord is teaching us here that being salt, and light is deeper than that. Jesus says, "You've heard it said, 'You shall not commit murder.'" What I say is, avoid senseless anger, abusive words, contempt for others."

We can destroy people in more ways than murder. We can destroy people through hatred, defamation, slander. We can destroy a person's good name by a wounding insult, by trivializing their self-worth, by dropping suggestive and malicious hints about their character. We may not stab people in the heart, but we can surely stab them in the back.

We are "light" when we respect human dignity or when we don't engage in personal insult and ridicule that pervade so much of our society today. Do you know someone who respects people even though they disagree with them? That person is the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Jesus is teaching us to look within because attitudes precede actions. The Lord is saying that the real measure of violence in our society is not found in the crime statistics but in all the ways we put people down, despise others, or hold grudges. The taking of life becomes just the next step in a world already steeped in hate. The measure of the breakdown of family life doesn't come from the number of divorces but from the lack of serious commitment and responsibility within our family relationships. The degree of untruth in our society is not measured by the number of perjuries but by all the lies and evasions and



deceptions and half-truths that we see in so many parts of our society.

In this world to be salt and light is to be people who respect others, to be people of fidelity to marriage vows and family life, and to be people of truth. What can we draw from these challenging words of Christ? There is a tendency today that we are products of our environment because our souls are like velcro, picking up what is out there. "Everybody does it." But we don't have to be like

everyone else. We do have a choice. There is an old comedy line when a man goes to the doctor and says, "I broke my arm in several places." The doctor replies, "Then stop going to those places." The Lord is also teaching us that our Christian identity is defined not only by what we don't do, murder, adultery, false witness, but by what we do. We always have the chance once more to renew our life, to examine the choices we are making, to look at the fidelities that are shaping our life. Do they come from the Gospel or the media?

Each Sunday is a call to remodel our lives into places of salt and light. We can only do so much about the world around us. We can do a lot about the world inside us.

