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Homily on Capital Punishment
SIXTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (B)
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"Do you want to be healed?" If someone were sick and this question were asked of them we can't imagine anyone saying "no" can we? After all, we assume that anyone who is sick or suffering would want to be healed! That would be our basic assumption if someone were suffering with leprosy, or cancer or any other modern day disease. But, let's think about it for a moment and consider what is involved.

First of all, asking for healing means taking risks; the leper in the gospel who came to Jesus was taking a risk! First, he was taking the risk of coming out in public. That was risk #1! We heard in the reading from Leviticus that the one with leprosy was to "dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp". The second risk was that Jesus might turn him away. Jesus could have said "I don't do leprosy, or I only do lepers on Thursdays!" This man risked having his hope disappear by acting on his hope.

The second thing we might consider is that asking for healing means making an effort! This unnamed man we hear about in all three of the synoptic gospels was willing to make the effort to find a cure. We can only imagine how much effort that may have been for him, but we know how hard it is at times for some of our loved ones when they have to go every week for radiation of chemotherapy to treat their cancer. We see the great effort they have to expend in seeking a cure!

We know that the miracles Jesus did while he walked this earth were not just for the individuals that he cured, but were also meant to teach the community. He "restored" the lost sheep to the community and taught them they should be doing the same. The question we might ask ourselves is are we striving to "restore" and "heal" in our society? We quarantine people for lots of different reasons today and satisfy our consciences by labeling them as "dangerous". Whether they are people with AIDS, or those who have committed crimes, or any number of other situations that would cause them to be outcast from our society, we quickly want to quarantine them so they will be "out of sight and out of mind". We can so easily label them in our minds as "unclean spirits" and easily forget that Jesus availed himself specifically

to these folks for healing.

During this legislative session of our General Assembly in Kentucky, we are going to be confronted with several issues that will either do more to "quarantine" or to "heal" our society. One of those issues has to do with the Death Penalty. We are asked by our bishops to help them support the effort to abolish the Death Penalty in our Commonwealth. Their fervent belief is that this move would go a long way in helping to "heal" us from the sickness of being such a violent society! To kill those who have killed, has been proven not to be a deterrent to crime. An execution in our age is based upon revenge, not upon protecting society, and we know that revenge has no place in the Christian life.

"Do we want to be healed" we might ask ourselves in this matter? What is at stake if we say "yes"? The same issues confront us that confronted the leper in today's gospel. There is the Risk factor. If we take a stand against the Death Penalty, we risk having others criticize us because the majority opinion seems to be that we should execute. It is risky being with the unpopular opinion, but it is a risk we must take if change is ever going to happen!

The second area where we are similar to the leper is that a "healing" of our society will demand an effort be put forth. Just as the leper had to put forth probably a monumental effort to get himself to Jesus, and those with cancer often put forth monumental efforts to undergo treatment, we too will have to exert a monumental effort to effect change with the Death Penalty or any other social illness we decide to address. Sitting in our homes watching the news or reading the newspaper about others working to effect change will not get the task accomplished! We each must be willing to become people of action by calling or writing our legislators and tell them of our convictions!

The story told to us today in the gospel of the leper who comes to Jesus asking for healing is a wonderful reminder of what we must do to bring about "healing" in our lives and in our society! We must take risks for healing to occur, and we must put forth a significant effort to bring about change. The leper in our gospel did not let the opportunity pass him by; will we be able to say the same?

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