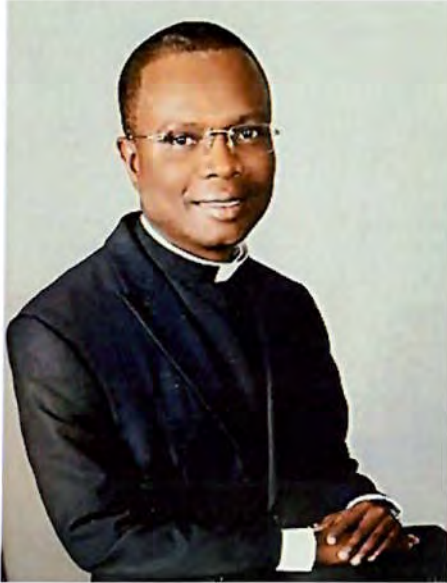


WORD FROM THE PASTOR

DIVINE HEALING BRINGS WHOLENESS TO THE HUMAN PERSON



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, on **this Health Sunday, the 1st reading, and the Gospel tell us about these people who are affected by leprosy.** This contagious disease was considered the consequence of sin. To avoid any contamination, lepers had to be kept away. They lived among themselves in the suffering of exclusion, without a home and without income.

When reading these biblical texts, we think of all the sick and disabled people who live on the margins of society and who suffer from loneliness. But **this Health Sunday is also intended to make visible healthcare personnel:** doctors, nurses, caregivers, researchers, helpers, visitors to the sick, chaplaincies and all associations that care for sick, elderly, or disabled people.

This service for the most vulnerable is not just the business of a few. It concerns us all. And to fulfill this mission it is to Christ that we turn. **Today's Gospel shows us that He was**

concerned about all the excluded. It was even His priority. With Him, evil does not have the last word. He is not afraid to defy the prohibitions by touching the leper. This freedom that He takes finds its source in His love for God and for His neighbor. It's a LOVE without borders that isn't afraid to shake up the rules. So, one day He healed a crippled man on the Sabbath. He explains to everyone that **the Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath.** It is in the same spirit that Saint Augustine gives this advice: "Love and do what you want." Freedom is the servant of love. It is love that makes it authentic and true.

When love is not hindered by anything or anyone, it becomes contagious. And that's what happens. Not only is Jesus not contaminated by leprosy, but He is the one who infects the leper. **The humanity of Jesus is the bearer of DIVINE LIFE. It is an instrument of salvation.** His holiness works throughout humanity. By touching the leper, He puts His healthy flesh in contact with the rotten flesh of the excommunicated one.

This Sunday's Gospel teaches us to turn to the Lord and let ourselves be touched by His infinite LOVE. And He sends us to others, recommending that we love one another "as He has loved us" (as much as He has loved us). **It is through our most fragile love that we will be recognized as His disciples.**

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time; February 11, 2024

Very Rev. Fr. Lucien Eugene Pierre Ph.D., Pastor, VF