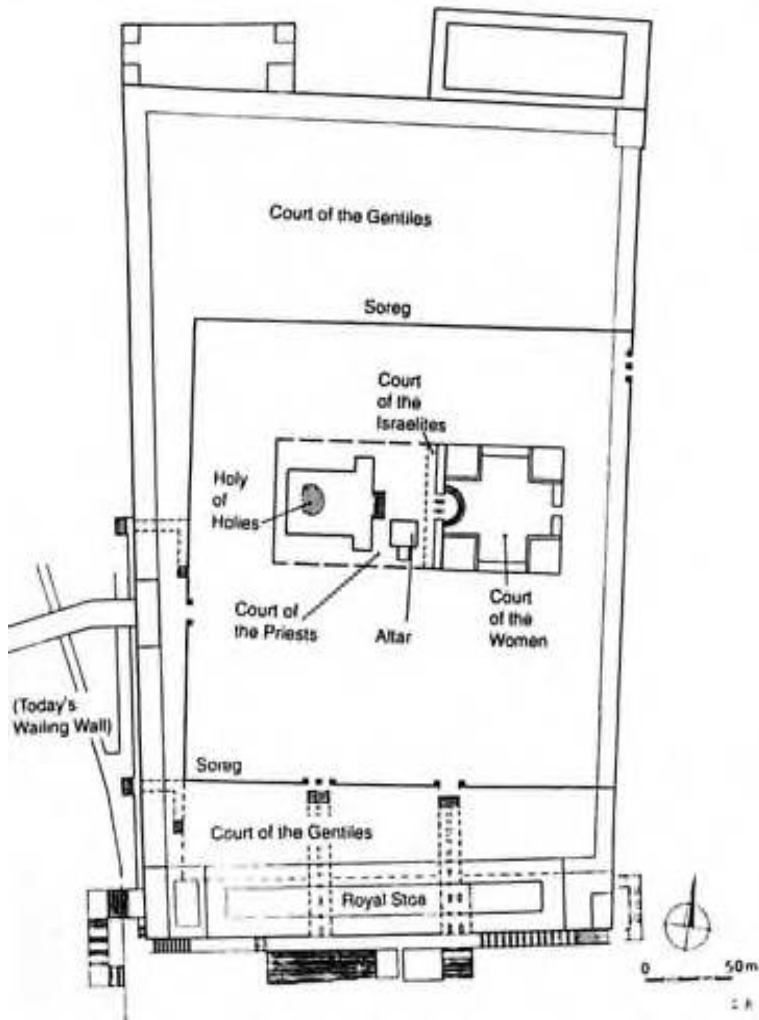


IF YOU CHOOSE, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN.



Next Sunday is the Sunday before Lent, please prepare St. Mark 9:2-9

The Sixth Sunday of Epiphany



(source unknown)

Today's Gospel St. Mark 1: 40-45 [Year B, Epiphany 6]

✠ A LEPER [*λεπρός* - *lep ros*] CAME TO JESUS, BEGGING HIM, AND kneeling [*kneeling* is omitted in some ancient manuscripts] he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' Moved with pity [*pity* is replaced by *anger* in some ancient manuscripts], Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and

IF YOU CHOOSE, YOU CAN MAKE ME CLEAN.

offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter. [© NRSV]

Leprosy

Today's Old Testament lesson speaks of Naaman's miraculous healing from Leprosy. Biblical legislation about Leprosy, now called *Hansen's disease*, is extensive and all inclusive, but none of the dozen or so symptoms depicted in Scripture is an actual symptom of Leprosy.¹ People became shunned, isolated non-persons because they had ringworm, eczema, psoriasis and even what might be a bad case of dandruff! The Biblical laws also describe leprosy of the *house* and of *clothing*, perhaps a mistaken understanding of common molds. The laws are found in Leviticus 13 - 14. Since the leper is required to stay outside the *camp* the laws seem to date from shortly after the time of the Exodus. Here is a sample.

Leviticus 13:²⁹⁻⁴⁶ When a man or a woman has spots on the skin of the body, white spots, the priest shall make an examination, and if the spots on the skin of the body are of a dull white, it is a rash that has broken out on the skin; he is clean. If anyone loses the hair from his head, he is bald but he is clean. If he loses the hair from his forehead and temples, he has baldness of the forehead but he is clean. But if there is on the bald head or the bald forehead a reddish-white diseased spot, it is a leprosy disease breaking out on his bald head or his bald forehead. The priest shall examine him; if the diseased swelling is reddish-white on his bald head or on his bald forehead, which resembles a leprosy disease in the skin of the body, he is leprosy, he is unclean. The priest shall pronounce him unclean; the disease is on his head. The person who has the leprosy disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, "Unclean, unclean." He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. [© NSRV]

One imagines that the late Michael Jackson's well known skin condition would have made him an Old Testament outcast!

¹ Ideas of Biblical infallibility are constantly challenged by its medical references.

The Sixth Sunday of Epiphany

There was an elaborate ritual for "cleansing" lepers:

Leviticus 14:¹⁻⁹ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: This shall be the ritual for the leprosy person at the time of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest; the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall make an examination. If the disease is healed in the leprosy person, the priest shall command that two living clean birds and cedar wood and crimson yarn and hyssop be brought for the one who is to be cleansed. The priest shall command that one of the birds be slaughtered over fresh water in an earthen vessel. He shall take the living bird with the cedar wood and the crimson yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the fresh water. He shall sprinkle it seven times upon the one who is to be cleansed of the leprosy disease; then he shall pronounce him clean, and he shall let the living bird go into the open field. The one who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean. After that he shall come into the camp, but shall live outside his tent for seven days. On the seventh day he shall shave all his hair: of head, beard, eyebrows; he shall shave all his hair. Then he shall wash his clothes, and bathe his body in water, and he shall be clean. [© NSRV]

Several sacrifices then followed.

In later Judaism there was a "Leper Station" in the Temple. On the next page you'll see a footprint of the polished marble Temple built during the time of our Lord. The building was huge, about the size of a dozen football fields put together. It was finished in 64 AD and destroyed in 70 by the Romans during the Jewish Insurrection. Notice the four box-like structures on the east side. They surround the Court of the Women. Each 60 foot square roofless chamber had a special purpose; the one on the Northwest was reserved as a bath for lepers.² After washing themselves they went to the circular steps (see picture) to await a priest who judged if they had been cured.

² The other chambers housed (NE) altar firewood and priests who checked it for ritual purity. In the SE the Nazarites (holy men) cooked peace offering and cut their long hair. The SW room stored wine and oil for drink offerings (sacrifices).