

First Reading. Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46 ¹

1. Proclaim the Text. **Mary Ellen Foley Reads the First Reading, NAB translation.**

All the listeners write down words, phrases, images which resonate in their hearing.

2. Echo Back a Response

Participants share words and images which struck the heart and mind and imagination as they listened. There is **no discussion, no questions** except for clarification.

3. Echo the Tradition (Fr. Pat's Presentation)

Biblical Background

Leviticus is the 3rd book in the Bible.

Jews call the first five books of the bible "**Torah**," which means "**Instruction**" -- a better translation than "Law."

In Hebrew a woman teacher is a **Morah**; a male teacher is a **Moreh**.

These books are also referred to as the **Pentateuch**, which comes from the Greek for five (*penta*) volumes (*teuchai*). Traditionally Moses is regarded as the author of the entire Pentateuch.

Some basic ideas go back to Moses, but not very many of them were written down in his lifetime.

The most ancient passages in the Torah are probably the poetic ones -- e.g., the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15.

The Writing of the Pentateuch / Torah

Without going into all of the gory details -- this is not "Intro to the Old Testament!" -- here is a summary.

For those who want more information, I recommend the PBS NOVA video, *The Bible's Buried Secrets*.²

Briefly, in OT times, Israelite tradition ascribed all law & instruction to Moses.

The writing of the Torah, however, was done in stages, beginning about **950 B.C.**, the time of David & Solomon.

The process was not completed until the Babylonian Exile, about **550 B.C.** or a little later.

Most of Leviticus was probably written in its final form about 550 B.C., about **700 years after Moses**.

"Leprosy" is not Hansen's Disease

Hansen's disease (modern "leprosy") was unknown in Israel when the OT was written.

It is impossible that Elisha cured Naaman of Hansen's Disease (2 Kings 5).

Hansen's disease was brought to the Middle East by the troops of Alexander the Great, on their way back from India.

Alexander died in 323 B.C.

After Hansen's disease arrived, it was called by the old name *sa'arat* "skin disease" or "scale disease."

In NT times it is impossible to know if the "lepers" cured by Jesus had Hansen's disease, eczema, or something else.

Liturgical Background

Chosen to go with Today's Gospel, where Jesus heals a leper.

Another option would have been Elisha's healing of Naaman (2 Kings 5).

4. Echo the Tradition Again: Questions, Comments, Observations

5. Proclaim the Text. **X Reads the First Reading from a Second Translation**

¹ My main resources for this course are: Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* (Liturgical Press, 1984); Dianne Bergant, with Richard Fragomeni, *Preaching the New Lectionary: Year B* (Liturgical Press, 1999).

² Some scholars date the earliest writing as late as 750 B.C., but 950 seems to be the consensus. For those who want a quick overview, I recommend the PBS Nova Video, *The Bible's Buried Secrets* -- this was recommended to me by my OT colleagues in the CBA when I requested an "update on the OT for a NT guy." <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/video/the-bibles-buried-secrets/>

6. Name the Good News

Participants share the good news of the text: for the original listeners; for the present-day hearer.

7. Name the Challenge

Participants share. Participants share the challenges of the text for the first hearers.

How does the text challenge the experience and understanding of the present day listener?

What is the pain and bondage and brokenness in the human situation touched by this text?

Psalm 32:1-2, 5, 11

X Reads the Psalm, NAB translation.

All the listeners write down words, phrases, images which resonate in their hearing.

Response: I turn to you Lord, in time of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

2. Echo Back a Response

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Remarks on "Salvation." For us "salvation" is a churchy word.

In the ancient world if you needed salvation you usually needed either a **general** or a **doctor**.

The Latin word *salus*, means "salvation" -- which can be **health**.

I forget if it is Spanish or Italian, but people say *salud* when someone sneezes

Like *Gesundheit* in German -- "health!"

Note on the missal version of the NAB.

The original NAB was published in 1970. The Psalm is following that translation!³

In 1986, the Psalms of the NAB were revised. This 1986 revision is not reflected in the Lectionary

In 1991, the NAB included the 1986 Psalms, plus a revised NT.

In 2010 the OT was completely revised, so thoroughly that it got a new name: NABRE!

The NT of the NABRE is currently being revised.

Presumably after that happens the readings of the Lectionary will be updated.⁴

Penitential Psalm.

This note accompanies Psalm 6 in the NABRE, and many of the points apply to Psalm 32:

The first of the seven Penitential Psalms (Ps 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143), a designation dating from the seventh century A.D. for Psalms suitable to express repentance. The psalmist does not, as in many laments, claim to be innocent but appeals to God's mercy (Ps 6:5). Sin here, as often in the Bible, is both

³ I have not checked the other readings closely.

⁴ Also the RCIA, the Rite for the Baptism of Children, the Rite for Confirmation, the rite for Penance, the rite for Pastoral Care of the Sick & Dying, the Rite for Ordination, the Rite for Matrimony, the Rite for Funerals, the Divine Office, the Book of Blessings --**all of these liturgical books have biblical passages in them!** Revising the Lectionary will also mean that **all** the "derived" texts -- one-volume editions, multi-volume versions, Gospel books, multi-volume Gospel books will need to be revised. This will result in a book bill of well over \$1,000.00 for each parish and minister (clergy or lay) who wants a complete set of the liturgical books. Updating a biblical translation is not a trivial matter for a highly organized, world Church! One of my Anglican friends once told me, "If you have a Bible and a Book of Common Prayer, you can do any Anglican service."

the sinful act and its injurious consequences; . . . The psalmist prays that the effects of personal and social sin be taken away.

Liturgical Usage

Fuller suggests that the “leprosy” of the first reading serves as a symbol for human sinfulness.

Just as skin lesions corrupt the body, so sin corrupts human relationships.

The result of leprosy / scale disease is isolation from the community.

Compare how currently the Covid pandemic isolates us from those we love.

This has been the story of sin from the beginning.

Adam and Eve were close to each other -- but finger pointing began after sin.

The pride of the Tower of Babel results in the scattering of its builders.

The worst part of the trauma of the “leper” in today’s Gospel is not his physical pain; it is his isolation.

Thoughts from a Former Hospital Chaplain

I used to think that because people read passages like this Psalm, people feel guilty when they are sick.

But gradually I began to realize, it was just the opposite.

Even Catholics, who rarely read the Bible, would say, “What have I done to deserve this?”

It is because sickness **feels like punishment** that poets write psalms like Psalm 32.

4. Echo the Tradition Again: Questions, Comments, Observations

5. Proclaim the Text. X Reads the Psalm from a Second Translation

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How does the text challenge the experience and understanding of the present day listener?

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Second Reading. 1 Cor 10:31-11:1

1. Proclaim the Text. X Reads the Second Reading, NAB translation.

All the listeners write down words, phrases, images which resonate in their hearing.

2. Echo Back a Response

Participants share words and images which struck the heart and mind and imagination as they listened.

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3. Echo The Tradition (Fr. Pat’s Presentation)

Scriptural Context: We continue our semi-continuous reading of 1 Corinthians.

Last week we ended at 9:23. We skip the last 3 verses of chapter 9, and the first 30 verses of chapter 10.

10:1-13 is a warning against over-confidence.

The people at the time of Moses had “spiritual food and drink.” Yet God was not pleased with them.

Implication: just because Christians have spiritual food & drink, we cannot presume we are pleasing God.

10:14-22 is a warning against idolatry

Participation in the “cup of blessing” is participation in the blood of Christ

The bread we break is a participation in the body of Christ.

It is true that an “idol is nothing.”

But what is sacrificed to an idol is sacrificed to a demon
“You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.”

10:23-31, 11:1 is about Seeking the Good of Others. Our passage this wee is the final 2 verse of this section. Paul has warned about attending pagan services in the previous section.

Now he deals with a different problem. What about food sacrificed to idols that ends up on the market?

There was not really anything like our “secular slaughter house” in the ancient world.

If the butcher was Jewish, he said a prayer to the LORD as he slaughtered an animal.

If the butcher was pagan, he said a prayer to some other god.

Selling sacrificed food on the market was a way for temples to make a little money.

In this context, Paul repeats some of their slogans (that they learned from him?) and responds

Their slogan	Paul’s Response
Everything is lawful	Not everything is beneficial
Everything is lawful	Not everything builds up

If you are invited to an unbeliever’s home, you don’t have to be scrupulous.

You don’t have to check whether or not the meat came from a pagan temple.

BUT, if someone tells you “this was sacrificed to an idol” do not eat it -- for the sake of conscience.

Then Paul clarifies: I mean the **other person’s conscience** not yours!

The main concern is to “build up **the other person**” not to assert your own rights.

And then come the verses we read at Mass.

Let’s hear them one more time.

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Gospel. Mark 1:40-45

1. Proclaim the Text. Jim Owen Reads the Gospel, NAB translation.

All the listeners write down words, phrases, images which resonate in their hearing.

2. Echo Back a Response

Participants share words and images which struck the heart and mind and imagination as they listened.

There is **no discussion, no questions** except for clarification.

3. Echo The Tradition (Fr. Pat’s Presentation)

Gospel Context

Mark has recounted the Baptism of Jesus, where a heavenly voice tells him “You are my beloved Son.” His story of the Temptation is only 2 verses (1:12-13). No specific temptation is mentioned by Mark.

Matthew & Luke both expand on this.

Jesus then calls his first disciples (1:16-20). They leave everything and follow him.

On the Sabbath he teaches in the synagogue of Capernaum, and casts out a demon (1:21-28)

On the same day he heals Simon’s mother-in-law and many others.

A Transitional Passage

This passage is “loosely joined” to its current context.

If you removed this story, chapter 1 of Mark would read just as smoothly!

It is joined to the previous passage by a simple “and” (often omitted in English translations).

Healing Stories Are Typically 3-Part

- 1) The Diagnosis (the situation of the sick person)
- 2) The Cure (by word, touch, or some other means)
- 3) Response to the Cure

This can be short: And all were amazed, [and said “We have never seen anything like this!”]

This part of the story is “overloaded” here because of Mark’s editorial concerns.

Do not take time to read this out loud -- just keep it in the notes for student reference.

Mark 1:40-45, Different Translations	
NAB	Anchor Bible⁵
<p>A leper came to him [and kneeling down] begged him and said, “If you wish, you can make me clean.” ⁴¹ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean.” ⁴² The leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean. ⁴³ Then, warning him sternly, he dismissed him at once. ⁴⁴ Then he said to him, “See that you tell no one anything, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses prescribed; that will be proof for them.” ⁴⁵ The man went away and began to publicize the whole matter. He spread the report abroad so that it was impossible for Jesus to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, and people kept coming to him from everywhere.</p>	<p>And a man with scale-disease came up to him, pleading with him and saying, “If you want to, you are able to cleanse me.” ⁴¹ And he, becoming incensed, stretched out his hand and touched him and said, “I <i>do</i> want to; be cleansed!” ⁴² And immediately the scale-disease left him, and he was cleansed. ⁴³ And Jesus, growling at him,⁶ immediately cast him out⁴⁴ and said to him, “See that you don’t say anything to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a witness to them.” ⁴⁵ But he went out and began to proclaim it all over and to spread the news abroad, so that Jesus was no longer able to go into a city openly, but had to remain out in deserted places. And the people came to him from everywhere.</p>

⁵ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 27, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 205.

⁶ In the Greek, it is not immediately obvious who is “growling at / sternly warning” and then “dismissing / casting out” whom! In the Greek **he** does the verbs to **him**. Passages like this lead me to suspect that Mark had the equivalent of a modern high-school education. By contrast, Matthew & Luke would be today what we consider “college educated.” They often clarify Mark, and improve his grammar and syntax. Because many modern translations of Mark also do these very things, in English it is often not clear just how much the other Evangelists are improving on Mark’s initial effort at writing a Gospel.

Question 1

Does the man kneel down? This is a **textual** variant. Some Greek manuscripts have it; some do not have it.

Has it been added by a scribe? Or has a careless scribe omitted it?

Translations: 1) omit it; 2) include it; 3) include it in brackets.⁷

Question 2

Does Jesus react to the request with “**pity**” or is he “**incensed**” / **angry**?

This is another textual variant.

Does Jesus “**dismiss**” the man or “**cast him out**?”

The second translation is much harsher! The word **is** the same one used when Jesus “casts out” demons.

Should it be translated the same here? Or does the context require a milder meaning? Translators disagree!

Verse 43. Ambiguous Greek

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in English it is often not clear just how much the other Evangelists are improving Mark!

Reflections on Inspiration

God does not choose the most educated people to do the job.

Being “inspired” does not make them write in a more educated manner!

Grace builds on nature!

Jesus Violates No Law⁸

A lot of Christian nonsense has been written about Jesus “putting love above the Law.”

Post-biblical Judaism has laws against touching lepers or lepers touching other people.

Such laws are not found in the Torah, the Law of Moses.

In the Bible there is no penalty specified for people who touch lepers, or for lepers who touch non-lepers.

In fact, John Meier points out that it appears that the priest **had to** touch lepers from time to time.

Notice that we read skipped from verse 2 to verse 44 in the first reading!

A lot of that covers the “gory details” of examining lepers who wish to be declared clean.

And it is hard to imagine the priest doing this without touching the person!

Respect for the Law of Moses

In fact, Jesus shows great respect for the Law in this passage.

According to the Law of Moses, only a priest can declare a person clean from leprosy.

As part of the ceremony the cleansed person makes a sacrifice -- the size of which depends on the person’s wealth.

Notice that Jesus does not presume to usurp the duties of a Jewish priest.

Rather, he instructs the man to obey the law of Moses, and sends him to the priest.

⁷ The United Bible Societies give this a “**D**” rating in their edition of the Greek NT. “A” = we are very sure what the sacred author wrote; “B” = we are sure what the sacred author wrote; “C” = there is some doubt about whether the sacred author wrote this, or whether it is a later addition by a scribe; “**D**” = there is considerable doubt about whether the sacred author wrote this or not.

⁸ For more details, see John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Volume 4, Law and Love (Yale, 2009), pages 411-413.

Looking Ahead

When we get to chapter 14 of Mark, we will see that Jesus has a meal in the house of Simon the Leper. Disciples of Jesus were also present. It was at this meal that a prophetic woman anointed the head of Jesus. As the story proceeds, people are bothered by the waste of expensive ointment
but nobody seems to mind having a meal in the home of Simon the Leper.

The Ending of the Story: Demonstration of the Cure

There are certain “tensions” in the story.

The man is not to communicate with anybody -- but he is to show himself to the priest!

Part of this tension is because Mark is adding “editorial comments” to a traditional story he has found.

These comments have to do with Mark’s theme of the “Son-of-God Secret,” a major Marcan theme.

Son-of-God Secret -- Don’t Psychologize

Fuller argues that it is useless to try to figure out why **Jesus** did not want people talking about his mighty deeds. The Son-of-God Secret is a **Marcan literary device**, not a memory of historical fact. In Fuller’s own words:

The difficulties disappear when we realize that at this point we are dealing not with history but with an artificial theological construction of the evangelist.⁹

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⁹ Fuller, *Preaching the Lectionary*, p. 302.