

Prisoners & Lepers; Similar Outcasts

11/17/13

In Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *The Phantom of the Opera*, the title character is marred not only physically but emotionally as well. (Some prisoners suffer physical malfunction due to emotional stress.) This poor soul had suffered a lifetime of rejection and a lack of human intimacy. (Most prisoners have experienced a childhood of rejection by their peers or their parents mixed with child abuse as their human intimacy.) In the end, the heroine Christine's Kiss reaches through his murderous rage and brings him to his right mind.

When the leper in Mark 1: 40-45 asks of Jesus, "Will you make me clean?" he is not asking only for an acceptable physical appearance; he is also asking to be loved and welcomed by other people again. (Prisoners who also accept Jesus' calling not only ask for a clean heart but also to be loved by their family and acceptable amongst society again.)

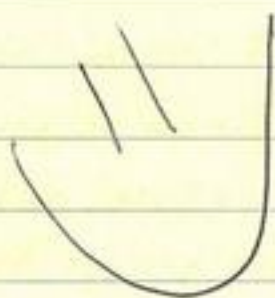
How long has it been since this leper had experienced the touch of another person? (It's been six years for me!) How long since he had felt the warmth of human companionship? (Prisoners feel the ice cold hatred of racial riots!) Yet Jesus' holiness overcame his isolation, just as it overcame the leper's horrible disease; with just one touch! (Mark 1:41)

We know that human touch is vital to our emotional and spiritual balance. Think of how well an infant thrives when he is held, caressed, and cradled by his mother. Think of how positively we all respond to a hand on the shoulder, a gentle kiss on the cheek, a warm embrace. Through simple touch, we can speak volumes about our love, acceptance, and companionship. What's more, we can also speak volumes about God's love.

So reach out and touch a prisoner's life today. Don't rely only on the logic of your words. And don't leave everything to God, thinking that he will sweep in and magically transform that person's life. As St. Teresa of

Avila said, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no feet but yours, no hands but yours." You can minister God's touch to a prisoner today. You can show them through your own gestures that their heavenly Father loves them, treasures them, and welcomes them.

Prisoners experience the most hurtful emotion a human being can endure; out of sight - out of mind! An outcast, just as the lepers of the Bible.



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