

The Holy Spirit Province

NEWSLETTER

27 January 2021



Dear Sisters and Brothers and Friends in the Passionist Family,

OUTSIDERS BECOMING INSIDERS: 6TH SUNDAY B

What kind of people do we tend to despise and reject?

I guess some of you will have seen the movie 'Shine' starring Geoffrey Rush. It tells the amazing story of the successful concert pianist, David Helfgott. Early on, as he improves his piano playing, he also falls into a serious mental illness and starts to disintegrate as a person. He is suffering from manic depression, and his moods swing from the bright heights of elation, joy, and excitement, to the black depths of sadness, loneliness, and despair. Very soon he loses his job, his home, and his family, and is placed in a mental hospital. His psychiatrist there even bans him from playing the piano. He ends up feeling rejected, isolated and abandoned, worthless and hopeless.

One day a woman called Gillian comes to visit one of the other patients at the hospital. A long-time fan of his music, she sees David mooching around and recognizes him. She says in the movie, 'at once I knew what the rest of my life would be about'. She takes him into her home, looks after him as one of the family, and takes on the responsibility for his recovery. Bit by bit he gets better, and with the help of medicines, he starts to control his mood swings. Most importantly to them both, he returns to playing the piano. Soon he is back on the concert stage, and his performances to exuberant and enthusiastic audiences are a personal triumph.

Of course, 'Shine' is only a film. But its story is true. It happened. It happened through the providence of God and the love of a good woman. It's a story too that is still happening, because David Helfgott continues to enchant concert audiences.

That story is an extension of the message of Jesus in the Word of God today, which is about accepting and welcoming the broken, the despised, the rejected, the odd bods, the misfits, and the outcasts, into our company and community, and offering them help and healing through our openness and generosity. In fact, Jesus challenges us to go out of our way to accept outsiders

and outcasts in the way that he put himself out, to befriend that poor leper of our gospel story.

As a leper, the man was barred from going to the temple. He was not allowed to associate with others in any way. He was not allowed to even see his family or friends. If anyone came anywhere close, he had to warn them by shouting out, 'Unclean!' 'Unclean!'

Since today we don't usually run into anyone with physical leprosy (Hansen's disease), we might identify at least some of those who are often treated as social lepers. Whom might we include? Let me suggest the following: - Persons with AIDS; alcoholics; drug addicts; mentally ill persons; neurotics; persons with obsessions; the very obese; the odd dressers; Gays and Lesbians; the handicapped; and the homeless. At times the outcasts of society even include the elderly; persons with dementia; teenagers; Immigrants; refugees; asylum seekers; and those who speak foreign languages. We can work out whom we would consider outcasts by asking ourselves: Whom do we judge as not being our kind of people? Whom would we avoid? Whom would we not want to be seen with or mix with? Whom would we leave off our invitations to parties?

By contrast, it was said of Jesus, that great mixer with all kinds of people - high and low, rich and poor, successful or drop-outs, influential or ordinary: 'This man welcomes outcasts and (even) eats with them.' Often, it was his sharing with them, his communion with them, that led them to better ways of being and better ways of living. Think, for example, of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, and how he turned around his life through contact with Jesus!

The care, kindness, welcome, compassion, generosity, and healing touch of Jesus towards outsiders, come through loudly and clearly in all the details of today's story of his meeting with the leper. He not only healed the man of his hideous and embarrassing skin disease, but he also healed him of his social isolation. by returning him as a changed man, to the company of his friends, family, and community.

Today Jesus is challenging me to rethink and alter my attitudes, my judgments, and my behaviour, towards all kinds of people out there who are different. What about you? Where do you stand?

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