



## **Bishop Paul Bird - Homily**

### **Sixth Sunday of Year B - Ballarat Cathedral, February 11, 2024**

One of my Redemptorist confreres, Fr John Martin, spent some years serving in India. He told me of a dramatic experience he had there one day. He was travelling on a bus on a country road. They came into a village and the bus stopped. A few people got on. But then Fr John heard some shouting at the door.

There was a man suffering from leprosy. His face and hands were disfigured by the disease. He was shouting that he wanted to get on the bus. The bus driver and some of the people near the door were shouting that they wouldn't let him on. Despite their shouts, the man charged onto the bus and ran down the aisle to a seat at the back. Then the driver came down the aisle with a large belt and started hitting the man and driving him back down the aisle towards the door. Fr John was very upset when he saw the man being hit like that. When the man came level with him, Fr John stood up and put himself between the man with leprosy and the driver with the belt. Fr John then walked down the aisle with the leper and got off the bus with him. The bus drove off.

There at the side of the road, Fr John felt distressed and bewildered by what had happened. He went to a little stall nearby and bought an orange. He sat down on the edge of the gutter and started to peel the fruit. He looked around and he saw that the man with leprosy was also sitting on the gutter a short distance away. Fr John went across, sat beside the man and offered him half the orange. In sharing the orange, they shared a moment of compassion and consolation.

What Fr John did that day was something like what Jesus did as described in this evening's gospel. He reached out in compassion to a man suffering from leprosy. In the gospel story, a leper came to Jesus and pleaded to be cured. Jesus was moved with compassion for this man who had suffered so much. He'd suffered physically. He'd also suffered from being shunned by others. Jesus reached out and touched him.

We can draw a couple of messages from this story for our own lives. First of all, it teaches us about Christ's compassion and this includes compassion for each one of us. Just as Christ was moved with compassion for the man suffering from leprosy, so Christ is moved with compassion for each one of us in the burdens that weigh upon us. He's moved with compassion and he's ready to reach out to us to give us the help we need.

The man in the gospel story pleaded with Jesus on his knees. We can do that in a spiritual sense. We can draw near to Jesus in prayer. When we do, we'll find him full of kindness. We can draw near to him in our Mass this evening. We can ask him for the help we need in our lives at this moment.

The gospel story has another message as well. It's an invitation to us to follow the example of Jesus and reach out in compassion to others. When he met that man suffering from leprosy, Jesus reached out to him and touched him. We too will meet people who are in need. They might be suffering from some illness. They might be weighed down by worries. They might be lonely. Whatever their need may be, the gospel encourages us to do what we can to reach out in compassion and offer our support.

Next Wednesday we begin the season of Lent. One of the programs we have during this season is called Project Compassion. This is a program of Caritas, a Catholic aid and development agency. In our Mass this evening, we're celebrating the launch of Project Compassion 2024. To help us with this, I'd like to invite

Michael McGirr to speak to us about Caritas and Project Compassion. Michael is the Mission Director for Caritas Australia. Welcome, Michael.