The sick people Jesus met in his ministry suffered the afflictions one would expect in a poor country: there were blind people, paralytics, deaf mutes, people with skin diseases, people with dire emotional difficulties, people "possessed". Many were deemed "incurable", and were abandoned to their fate, left without any means of earning a living: consequently they hobbled through life as beggars, constantly confronted with misery and hunger. Jesus saw them lying by the roadside, at the entrances to the villages, or by the synagogues, pleading for pity from the passers by.

For these peasants, their illness was not only a medical condition but something which prevented them from living as the other children of God lived. The great misfortune of the blind was not to be able to see life around them. Without eyes to see, they lost touch with realty; they could not see faces or fields, it was harder for them to think perceptively, to measure the value of things. The deaf mutes had an inability to communicate, unable to hear messages from others or express themselves: they could not speak, bless or sing; enclosed in their isolation, they could hear only themselves. Those unable to use hands or feet could not work, move or take action; they could not make the pilgrimages to Jerusalem, the holy place, they could not embrace another person or dance through life. What they yearned for was not just a cure for their affliction but to be able to live life as fully as others did. Don't we hear in the Gospel that our Jesus is *moved with pity* for them all?

Lepers experienced their illness with much pain and rejection. Among them were not only people suffering from leprosy as we know it today, but included those afflicted by various different skin ailments which separated them from the rest of the community, rendered them being judged as punished by God. Sickness in the time of Jesus, just as in all times and places, raised the spontaneous question that arises from any grave illness. Why? Why me? Why now? The people of Jesus' time and culture would not just look on their sickness from a medical viewpoint but from a religious one. If God, the Creator of life, had withdrawn his lifegiving spirit from them, surely it meant he was abandoning them, they would think.

Lepers were separated from the community not only for fear of being contagious, but because they were seen as impure, and might contaminate the holy people of God. Exclusion from the community—a harsh prescription for those living in a society like that of Galilee, where you could really only survive as an integral part of family and village. A tragic exclusion. Abandoned, they thought, by God, by society, stigmatised by their neighbours, largely excluded from community life, these sick people were probably the most marginalised of people. But are they really abandoned by God, or rather, does the Father not have a privileged place in his heart for them? The Gospel fact is beyond doubt: Jesus was devoted to them. He came near to those who were seen as *Godforsaken*, he touched lepers whom no one else would touch, gained the trust of those who could not enter the temple on account of their sickness, and he brought them into the circle of the people of God. They had to be the first to feel the Father's mercy and witness the arrival of his Kingdom. He fulfilled the expectation and promise of his first sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth: *to bring good news to the poor, to bind up hearts that are broken, and to announce the year of favour from the Lord.*

All the Christian sources speak of the healings and exorcisms of Jesus. Further, the Jewish historian Flavius, writing about 90AD reports that during the reign of Pontius Pilate "there was a wise man named Jesus who performed amazing deeds". Healing was an expression of Jesus' love. He did it by word and gesture. In this Sunday's gospel (in a story unique to Luke) ten lepers cry out to him, calling him by name, "Jesus!" (a name which means "God saves"). He tells them first to go to the priest as their tradition required for examination and an also for an official declaration of their cure. But this story highlights also the response of those cured. A solitary Samaritan comes back to give thanks. This story illustrates Luke's concern to show the Church, the world, and primarily his Gentile readership and audience that Jesus seeks to touch not only the hearts of his own people but is Saviour of and Salvation for the whole human race, a Messiah for all peoples and times. Indeed sometimes those who are the supposed "chosen ones" forget to give thanks.
This healed foreigner is the hero!

We must not take our "chosenness" for granted!