

*6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
*February 12, 2012*  
*Homily by Fr. John De Celles*  
*St. Raymond of Peñafort, Springfield, Va.*

Have you ever wondered why, after exercising his divine power  
in curing the leper in today's Gospel, [why] Jesus tells him:  
"go, show yourself to the priest ..."  
After all, Jesus is God,  
why would he send the leper to a mere man, to be judged?

The thing is, Jesus recognizes  
that for the leper to be welcomed back into the community  
someone in authority had to determine  
that he was physically "clean" enough to come back.  
And he reminds us that the law, given to Moses by *God himself*,  
in other words, by *Jesus himself*,  
prescribes that only the *priests* have that authority.

Now, this was the law of the *Old Covenant*,  
but we know that the *Old Covenant foreshadows* the *New Covenant*.  
So in the *New Covenant* Jesus *kept* the office of priesthood,  
but made it a *new* priesthood, and he was the one true priest.  
Even so, he chose to share his priesthood with his apostles  
for the good of the Church.  
So he gave them the responsibility to offer the *sacrifice* of the *New Covenant*,  
the Eucharist.  
And he gave them the power to judge, not *physical* purity,  
but *spiritual* purity:  
"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven."  
And he gave them authority to *rule* and *teach* in his name:  
"whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven."  
So just as by divine law the *Jews* turned to the priests of the *Old Covenant*,  
the *Church* also turns to the priests of the *New Covenant*  
for judgment and leadership.

This is especially so in the case of the successors of the apostles,  
the Pope and bishops.

But there are many who would like to usurp that apostolic authority.  
We see this nowhere more clearly than  
in the current attempt to force Catholics  
to purchase insurance to cover

contraception, sterilization and abortifacients.

We see, for example,

how the presidents of the *Catholic Health Association*  
and the *University of Notre Dame*  
have repeatedly placed *their* judgment over  
the judgment of the *bishops* of the United States.

Some in the *media*, and even *Planned Parenthood*  
think they should speak for Christ and his Church.

And some argue that opinion polls of Catholics should speak for the Church.

But most appalling of all is that we see this same arrogance in our *president*.  
He reminds me of King Henry VIII in the 16<sup>th</sup> century

who declared himself head of the Church of England  
because the pope and the English bishops, at least initially,  
would not consent to *his* judgment of what was moral and immoral.

In a similar way our president has the gall to claim

he has the authority to tell the bishops that they, and the pope,  
are mistaken in teaching that contraception, sterilization and abortifacients  
are contrary to God's law.

And because of that he feels he has the authority to force the bishops,  
and all Catholics, to do what they find morally repugnant.

In the reversal of today's Gospel,

he treats them not like the priest, but like the leper,  
not as leaders but as someone to be shunned  
and cast out of the community.

Now, we all know that bishops make mistakes.

They are certainly not *infallible* in *all* things:

they are sometimes foolish, sometimes sinners,  
and sometimes even heretics.

Look at the bishops in England under Henry VIII

--initially they *fought* his heresy but in the end all but one caved in,  
abandoned the pope and joined Henry's church.

But when bishops are in union with the Pope,

and pass on the moral teaching that popes and bishops  
have consistently taught for 2000 years,

there is *no doubt* that they speak for Christ and His Church.

And that is *exactly* what our bishops are doing when they teach that  
contraception, sterilization and abortifacients are gravely sinful.

So, when it comes the free exercise of religion,  
we Catholics do so by following the Church's *ancient* moral teachings  
faithfully taught by *our bishops*.

*No one else,*

not Planned Parenthood,  
not the Catholic Health Association or Notre Dame,  
not the media or public opinion polls,  
and *definitely* not the President of the United States,  
can tell us what is moral or immoral,  
or what it means to exercise our Catholic religion.

And when we oppose them, they cannot treat us like lepers,  
as second citizens.

I don't really want to preach about this today:

the story of the leper is very beautiful,  
and there are lots of things I'd like to say about it.

But I have to, because last Friday our president announced an "accommodation"  
on this insurance issue.

The media is presenting it as a great compromise—but it's nothing of the sort.  
Once again, the president claimed the authority

to tell us what is moral and immoral,  
and he continues to ignore our religious liberty.

Now, I've been paying pretty close attention,  
and unless I'm gravely mistaken,  
he really didn't change *anything*—just played a little shell game.

He says he won't make religious *institutions*, like hospitals and universities,  
buy insurance to cover contraception, sterilization and abortion.  
Instead he'll make the *insurance* company provide those "services"  
*"free" of charge.*

First of all, does he really think that insurance companies will do that *for free*?  
There is no law in this land that can force them to do that.  
And there's no such thing as a free lunch  
—inevitably the overall premiums will simply go up,  
and the church will wind up paying for it one way or another.

But even if somehow the laws of economics would be suspended,  
it's not really about the *money*,  
it's about being *providing immoral services.*

Think about this:  
the policy *before*  
forced church institutions  
to buy insurance policies that provide  
contraception, sterilization and abortion;  
the policy *after*  
forces church institutions  
to buy an insurance policies that provide  
contraception, sterilization and abortion.

*Nothing's* changed.

Beyond that, the president's accommodation applies only to  
"Religious *organizations*".

It does nothing the *individual* Catholics who buy insurance for *themselves*,  
or the Catholic *business* man or woman  
who buy insurance for their employees?

What about their right to free exercise of religion?

Right now the Bishops are still considering  
the proper response to the president's shell game.  
So far I have been *extremely* proud of their courage and wisdom.  
But like you and me, bishops can fall,

especially under the tremendous pressure that they are under.  
Remember that in 16<sup>th</sup> century England, in the end  
all the English bishops abandoned the Catholic Church to side with Henry.  
All, that is, *but one*: Saint John Fisher,  
who was *martyred* for his fidelity.

I think our bishops are made of stronger stuff than those English Bishops  
—some are even made of the same stuff as John Fisher.  
But they need our continued uncompromising support.  
And they especially need our prayers.  
Pray that they may take to heart St. Paul's admonition today:  
"whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God."  
And pray that by standing strong together  
with the grace of their ordination as priests of the New Covenant,  
they may imitate the fidelity and courage of St. John Fisher  
but be spared of sharing in his martyrdom.