Healing of a leper
(From Conversation with God, Fernandez Carvajal)

The healing of a leper narrated in the Gospel of today's Mass must have moved people very much, and it figured frequently in the preaching of the apostles. The fact that it is related in great detail by three of the Evangelists makes this clear. Saint Luke provides the detail that the miracle was performed in a town, and that the disease was in an advanced state. The leper was covered with it: a man full of leprosy, Luke says.

At that time leprosy was an incurable condition. The limbs of the leper became gradually affected by the progressive illness, which would produce disfigurement to the face, hands and feet, and great suffering. For fear of contagion lepers were driven away from built-up areas and forbidden to use the highways. As we see in the First Reading of the Mass, they were pronounced legally unclean. They had to keep their heads uncovered and wear torn clothes to distinguish themselves, and were obliged to make their presence known when they passed close to any inhabited place. People fled from even members of their own families. Their affliction was generally held to be a punishment from God for their sins. Thus it is strange to find this leper inside a city. Perhaps he has heard of Jesus and has been eagerly looking for a chance to approach him. At last he has found him and breaks the strict precept of the old Mosaic Law in order to speak to him. Christ is his hope, his only hope.

It must have been an extraordinary scene. The leper knelt before Jesus. If you want to, he said; you can make me clean. If you want to. Perhaps he had prepared a longer speech, explaining things, but in the end this simple blurted-out aspiration, filled with trust, with sincere sensitivity, is enough: if you will, you can. These few words, stammered out, are in a fact a powerful prayer. Jesus took pity on him, and the three Evangelists describe the surprising gesture of Our Lord: He stretched out his hand and touched him. Until now everyone had recoiled from him in dread and loathing, but Jesus, who could have healed from a distance as He had done on other occasions, not only did not draw away from him, but even touched his leprosy. It is not hard to imagine Christ's affection and the gratitude of the leper when he saw Our Lord's gesture and heard his words: I will; be clean.

Our Lord always wants to heal us of our weaknesses and our sins. And there is no need for us to wait months or days for him to pass through our city or our town. Every day we can find the same Jesus of Nazareth who healed the leper. He is there in the nearest tabernacle, in the heart of a soul in grace, in the sacrament of Penance. He is our Physician, and He cures our selfishness if we but let his grace penetrate into the depths of our soul Jesus has taught us that the worst sickness is hypocrisy, the pride that leads us to conceal our own sins. We have to be totally sincere with him. We have to tell the whole truth, and then we have to say: Lord; if you will - and you are always willing - you can heal me of my sickness. You know my weaknesses; I feel these symptoms; these failings make me feel wretched. We show him the wound, with simplicity, and if the wound is festering, all the wretchedness of our life.

Today we should remember that our very failings and weaknesses can be the opportunity for us to approach Christ as the leper did. Do we go to

confession with these dispositions of faith and trust? Do we have a real desire for purity of soul? Do we make sure we go to confession regularly?