



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

## Mass for Scouts and Guides *Bishop Richard Moth's Homily*

12 FEBRUARY 2012, ST GEORGE'S CATHEDRAL, SOUTHWARK

In the Gospel today, we find Jesus curing a man of his leprosy. To touch someone who had the disease was extraordinary in those times – the leper was supposed to keep away. He or she was cast out of society on account of the fear of the disease spreading. Yet Jesus reaches out and touches him. When he has been cured, he is told by Jesus to follow the directions of the law – to see the priest, to make an offering in thanksgiving and so to be welcomed back into the community. Jesus reaches out – literally – to the leper who is an outcast from his community.

Leprosy has been around for about 4000 years.

In 2009, Damien of Molokai – the “Leper Priest” – was canonised by Pope Benedict XVI. He was sent as a missionary to Hawaii in 1864. Leprosy had been brought to the islands of Hawaii and in 1873 he volunteered to work at the colony that had been established for lepers. He discovered that he had contracted the disease eleven years later and remained at the colony, caring for the people there, until his own death in 1889. He was 49 years old.

Leprosy colonies still exist around the world, especially in India, and the last European Leper Colony closed only a little over 50 years ago. Today, the condition is treatable and, where good treatment is available, people with the disease no longer live apart from the rest of society.

Damien of Molokai followed Jesus in reaching out to the leper, serving him and caring for him and we should take that message to heart for ourselves in the society in which we live and in which we are members of the Scout Association. We may not find lepers on our streets and there are no leper colonies in this country. There are, however, many people who are in need of our service – the friendly word, the welcoming gesture. None of this needs to be complicated.

“Scout Community Week” provides us with a wonderful opportunity for this service. The older ones amongst us will remember, like me, the “bob-a-job” week of years gone by. The purpose was just the same then – service of others. Service is uncomplicated – it is the giving of ourselves for others. We may do this in different ways, but the one thing we must do is use our gifts and every one of us if called to do this. Don't leave it to someone else!

As Catholic members of the Scout Association, we might ask ourselves why we do these things. When we serve others, we might feel good about it. That is OK – it would be very odd to feel bad about helping someone else! BUT – Jesus reminds us that when we serve others, we serve Him. That is our real reason for serving others – we are carrying out the work of Jesus himself. Just as Jesus reached out to the leper and gave him new life, so our service of others – although very small in comparison to the events of today's Gospel – does bring them new life.

It assures them of the goodness of those around them, where goodness is sometimes lacking. It helps them to carry their burden, especially when we come to the help of those who are struggling with life through old age, ill health or just the business of life today.