I know of a parish in a city not far from here
Where, years ago, the pastor instructed the people, instead of saying
"O Lord I am not worthy" at communion time,
he had them say "O Lord, I AM worthy to have you come to me."

The parish was in one of the most run-down parts of the city.
Many of the people who were part of that parish
were what are called "street people."
They were among the "no-counts" of society.
This pastor had a great love and compassion for these people
who tended to be the outcasts of society.
His desire was to remind them about their own dignity and worth.

Funny thing is, our use of those words, "Lord, I am not worthy ..."
at Communion time at every Eucharist comes right out the Gospels.

And I think there is purpose in our use of those words,
as challenging and off-putting as they may sound.

Which brings us to the reference of lepers in today's readings.
Leprosy at the time of the Gospels
could refer to just about any kind of bodily disfigurement.
And people regularly equated such bodily defects, flaws, skin diseases
with God's punishment for sin.

Lepers, in a very real way became society's scapegoats.
They represented what people feared was true about themselves.

We human beings are quite adept at hiding our weaknesses,
the unsightly, even sinful, aspects of our lives.

In biblical times people feared lepers because they reminded them
of their own enslavement, their deformities, their warts
and their own eventual decay.
Shunning lepers was, among other things, an unconscious way
that people protected themselves from facing their own frailty
and the inevitable approach of death.
Perhaps the worst of it is that we can hide our own frailty from ourselves.
believing in the image we project
rather than the truth— and the beauty— of who we are.

Jesus steps into the situation and touches the leper;
riskS becoming marginalized himself for the sake of this leper.

Every time we come to Communion we ask Jesus to touch us,
to make us more whole.

He cannot do that unless we are willing to acknowledge our frailty, our profound neediness.

In a very real way he says to us, "What do you want me to do for you?"

May our sincere response be "Of course, I want you to heal me."

The priest in that parish I spoke of at the beginnings had his heart in the right place.
I think he missed that communal recognition and acknowledgment of our neediness, our woundedness that brings us before the mercy-seat of the God who longs to say to us “Of course, I want to heal you.”

Chuck Van Vleet becomes an IHM Associate today.
Not so much about helping out,
but becoming part of something greater than himself.
Like the leper in the Gospel story, Chuck becomes an apostle,
like the leper sent to the priest.
Sent in the name of Jesus to announce Good News.