

Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

September 9, 2012

The Gospel is clear. Jesus is healer. Jesus took aside a deaf man with a speech impediment, opened his ears and released his tongue. The Gospel of Mark is full of such stories. There are people possessed: a man convulsed, a boy foaming and grinding his teeth, a little girl. There is Simon Peter's sick mother-in-law; a leper begging to be cleansed; a paralyzed man let down by his friends through the roof; a man with a withered hand; the dead small daughter of a synagogue leader; a woman hemorrhaging for 12 years; a blind man imploring Jesus to touch him, and the blind Bartimaeus pleading for mercy.

The other evangelists are hardly different. Matthew tells us Jesus "went throughout Galilee curing every disease and every sickness among the people." Luke not only talks of leprosy, paralysis, a withered hand, possession, a dead only son, blindness. There is that striking scene in Luke where John the Baptist sends two disciples to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus' answer is: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them." In John's Gospel, a Samaritan woman healed of her marital infidelities; a man 38 years ill and Lazarus dead four days; an adulteress and a man blind from birth. Jesus healed. Healed broken bodies; healed savaged spirits; healed mangled minds.

But why? Why did Jesus heal? On the face of it, often out of compassion: raising to life the only son of a widowed mother. Or to signal that God's reign has come to earth in Jesus: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near." But there is something more profound. The very word "heal" has to do with wholeness. Why did Jesus heal? To put the ill, the wounded, the living dead, the sinner on the way to wholeness, to be genuinely and fully alive. In a word, to restore harmony, communion, on four levels: with God, within each human person, between sisters and brothers, and with the earth. In that way to build up the kingdom of peace and justice and love. To make the Body of Christ whole.

But healing did not stop with Jesus' return to his Father. Within the church, healing is an ever-present must. Why? Because the church is human and composed of sinners. The organization and each of us baptized into it are always in need of reform. Because our church is not the final kingdom. As long as selfishness and sin, hunger and hate, corruption and conflict, division and distance, distress and despair, disease and death roam our earth and infect our church, Christianity is not yet *whole*.

We are part of the problem and we are part of the solution, part of the sickness and part of the remedy. In the words of Henri Nouwen, we are wounded healers. Someone recently wrote: If you are looking for a perfect church and you find it, join it. Then and there it will no longer be perfect. We are part of the solution in several ways. First, some Christians are called to image Christ the healer by confronting physical or psychological sickness. Surgeons and therapists and caretakers. Suffering is not an end in itself. Second, the healing that is reconciliation. To destroy hostility between ourselves and God, within and among ourselves, and between us and the rest of God's creation.

I limit myself to oneness with one another – to Jesus' command, "Love one another as I have loved you." I do not avoid conflict. In any human institution conflict is inevitable. In the Catholic Church conflict goes back to the middle of the first century, when Paul had to write to the church in Corinth, "It has been reported to me that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters." All Catholics, however, must still be reconcilers. Reconciliation does not mean we always agree. It does mean disagreement will never destroy our oneness in love.

A final word: two questions. 1) Where do I need healing? In my personal relationship with God? A running battle with family? With Catholics prochoice or prolife, supporting marriage equality or marriage between a woman and a man? Republican? Democrat? In the way I use God's good earth? 2) Where am I Christ the healer, bringing others to wholeness? It is my Christian vocation and yours. Outside these walls and within them. Where does the healing Christ call *you* to heal? I don't know. Only you know – only you and Christ. The Christ who calls you. Calls you now.