

HEALING

There are many good people who suffer with illnesses and are never healed and this is something we may face at one time or another.

It's a mystery, something hidden and not readily understood and as noted in Deuteronomy 29:28, *Things hidden belong to Yahweh our God, but things revealed are ours....*

When suffering happens we are usually advised to accept it as redemptive, offering the pain and hardship to the Lord for penance and purification. One is hard pressed to find alternative advice when even medical procedures are slow and painful in helping. We may easily ask where is God's clear path to healing? His response, however, may not be easy, especially when the suffering we experience is part of the answer. It is clear that God wants what is best for us and redemptive suffering may be the answer but **if it is not the total answer** what efforts can we make to remove our own shortcomings that hinder the healing process?

Yes, Jesus and the disciples encountered plenty of suffering but these hardships came not from illness but from persecutions from those under the influence of demonic forces; and this is something followers of Jesus all encounter. As disciples there is much for us to do and we can better serve when healed. Consider Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31), healed of her fever by Jesus with an immediate response of rising from the sick bed and serving those present.

What are possible keys to healing? Can we identify at least some of them or do they all belong to God's realm? If we can identify them can we then remove them? In the Scriptures we never hear of Jesus refusing healing and telling a person to go and suffer. Instead we read, "*Before long the whole town was outside the door and those he cured were variously afflicted and many,*"(Mark 1:33-34) and "*at sunset, all who had people sick with a variety of diseases took them to him, and he laid hands on each of them and cured them,*"(Luke 4:40) and "*he cured the people of every disease and illness,*"(Matthew 4:23), and "*large crowds of people came to him bringing with them cripples, the deformed, the blind, the mute....and he cured them.*"(Matt 15: 29-31). An exception is when he returned to Nazareth where "*he did not work many miracles because of their lack of faith.*"(Matt 13:58).

In such cases we must *ask* along with the father of the possessed boy, *"I do believe! Help my lack of trust!"* (Mark 9:14-29).

At the end of Mark's Gospel the disciples were commissioned by Jesus but not before their unbelief and hardness of heart were chastised. In Mark 16:14-18, we are told that signs will accompany those who believe, and one of them is: *they will lay hands upon the sick and they will recover*, but it never says how long will it be before they recover. Jesus' healings are usually described as instantaneous but the example of the blind man at Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26) has Jesus applying his hands twice to the man's eyes before he could see perfectly; Naaman, an esteemed and respected commander, suffered from leprosy and plunged into the Jordan seven times, as directed by the prophet Elisha, before his flesh became again like the flesh of a little child and became clean (2 Kings 5:1-15). We have lost track of the fact that healing may be progressive, more likely to occur over a period of time rather than instantaneously, in order that we may grow spiritually with the healing process. When persons pray for healing or are prayed over for healing they feel emotionally uplifted but their hope and belief may fade in even a short time.

It is important to practice **patience** and keep "plugged into" the Lord's healing process keeping a positive and thankful outlook. Daniel 10 furnishes an example of patience, prayer, and sacrifice in seeking an answer to prayer. Daniel mourned for three full weeks, ate no savory food, no meat or wine during that time. The angel Gabriel appeared to him saying, *"from the first day you made up your mind to acquire understanding and humble yourself before God, your prayer was heard. Because of it I started out and my way was blocked for twenty-one days until Michael came to help me."* We may ask how often is our prayer blocked in some unknown way and what can we do about it? Are we disciplined enough to follow Daniel's example when called to do so? Do we realize that his kind of fast may help us physically as well as mentally and spiritually?

Another important first step that is an impediment to healing is **unconfessed sin**. Proverbs 28:13: *He who conceals his sins prospers not, but he who confesses and forsakes them obtains mercy.* The seven Penitential Psalms furnish a meditation to begin this process: Psalms 5, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143. For example,

Psalm 32:5: *Then I acknowledged my sin to you, my guilt I covered not. I said, "I confess my faults to the Lord, and you took away the guilt of my sins."*

It may hurt our dignity to admit our sins for they can be embarrassing and shameful to us, but we don't confess to inform God of what they are and nothing we can say will shock him; we confess for our own benefit so we can take stock of our shortcomings and come to the realization of what we need to change in our lives. God forgives the penitent heart so this makes it clear that we also need to forgive ourselves and not continue to carry on with disrupting guilt.

Lack of **forgiveness** towards others is a common attitude that hinders healing. Mark 11:25 states: *When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you may have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you.* If you pray with resentment and/or anger in your heart against another the channel for your prayer encounters a rocky road instead of a clear path.

Forgiving another can oftentimes be very difficult especially when a deep hurt is involved. Regardless of our feelings we need to make a firm decision to forgive and forget and forget that we have forgiven; let us be firm in our resolve. We can seek help in prayer not only to forgive others but also to sensitize our consciences to any resentments and bitterness we may still harbor; we need to renounce all hard-hearted attitudes.

The parable of the unforgiving servant gives an important insight (Matthew 18:21-35). When the king called in his officials to even up accounts one of them owed a great deal and was unable to pay so the master ordered him and his family to be sold, but he pleaded and was shown mercy and had the debt written off. But after he left he in turn confronted a servant who owed him significantly less and was merciless toward him. When the master heard of this hard-heartedness he called back the one to whom he showed such mercy and handed him over to the tormentors until all would be paid back. Jesus ends the parable with a strong warning: *My heavenly Father will treat you in exactly the same way unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.*

When we realize how much forgiveness we need from the Lord for our sinfulness over the course of our lives, and compare this with the forgiveness we

need to show to others it is like comparing a mountain to a molehill, and it is common sense for us to always respond with our limited mercy and receive the Lord's unlimited mercy in return! This reminder to forgive is constantly before us when we pray the "Our Father".

Self-righteousness that holds others in contempt also detracts from our prayer as indicated in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). Jesus makes it clear the Pharisee put himself above the tax collector in all the "right and formal" aspects but that the humble man who beat his breast and sought God's mercy because of his sinfulness was the only one who left the temple justified. The Pharisee gave thanks to God for "himself" and was unable to find a good word for another. Thomas of Kempis, author of the Imitation of Christ, also says to "put ourselves above even one person" can be a most serious fault leading to pride and a fall from grace.

One hindrance to healing we may let slip by is **occult involvement**, be it fortune telling, horoscope, Ouija boards, or hard rock. These areas have infiltrated our culture in ways that can be subtle. Regardless of any involvement we may have had, even innocently, renounce them and ask Jesus to remove from us any of their influences.

A recent article noted that Wicca is a fast growing religion and young women are seeking out witchcraft in great numbers, believing their magic rites can bring them success, power, recognition, and even healing. One city in Florida was stated to have more than eighty covens and men as well as women are involved.

Daily newspapers print horoscopes and even if you read them you are quietly acknowledging their possible validity....it is best to simply stay away from them. Fortune telling is a way of involvement and people will say "but I was told something that is really true!" The experience of Paul and Silas in Philippi (Acts 16:16) gives us an answer to this since they were followed by a slave girl around the city saying, *"These men are servants of the Most High God; they will make known a way of salvation."* After a few days Paul became annoyed, turned to her and said to the spirit: *"In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you, come out of her!"* Then and there the spirit came out of her but her masters who saw their source of profit

was gone created problems for Paul who was then seized, flogged, and put in jail. Note that she was telling the truth about Paul and his companions but yet her spirit was exorcised through the name of Jesus. Demonic spirits can exhibit supernatural signs, even truth, on occasions, but anything not of the Holy Spirit is to be avoided. Deuteronomy 18:10-12 says, *"Let there not be found among you a fortune-teller, soothsayer, charmer, diviner, or a caster of spells, nor one who consults ghosts and spirits or seeks oracles from the dead."*

In the Gospels when Jesus healed it was often in coordination with dispelling evil spirits. In Luke 4:40-41 we read *that people with a variety of diseases were brought to Jesus and he laid hands on each of them and cured them and demons departed from many crying out as they did, "You are the Son of God."* He also healed on the Sabbath in the temple and this brings forth an interesting point, namely that these Israelites were regular church goers, people like us, not some fringe element of society that we can point to. Recently in his homily a priest looked out at the congregation and said there isn't a person here that doesn't have a demon. This does not mean a person is possessed by a demon since we are possessed by Christ through our baptism, but it means that there can be a part of one's personality or character that is seriously influenced or tormented by demons such as anger, lust, jealousy, greed, malice, deceit, blasphemy, pride or arrogance.

Demonic activity can show its ugly head as the effects of a curse, something like a dark shadow that interferes with our progress, for example, when we are the verge of some success there is something that always goes wrong and we are stopped short of where we want to be. This can also be in the form of mental or emotional breakdowns or chronic sickness that plagues a family; continual financial problems, marriage breakdowns, family alienation, accident proneness, or even suicide or unnatural deaths. Such problems can even begin as pre-natal involvement, say, a mother's resentment in having a child and giving rise to a spirit of rejection. Or being brought up in a manipulating or dominating environment; perhaps a dysfunctional family involving a alcoholism or drug addiction. However, Jesus was made a curse so that each of us can be redeemed from such effects because Jesus can remove it and we have been purchased with his blood.

In terms of sickness demonic activity can be directly causing such things as infirmity, pain, crippling, or even death or it can be indirect and subtly influencing our outlooks causing us to become discouraged, disheartened, and depressed. Elderly people can easily reach a stage where they "no longer find any hope in life and even wish they were dead." This is a dangerous attitude that invites the spirit of death and can be countered by meditating on Psalm 118:17: *"I shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord."*

These important areas of recognizing and confessing sins and forgiving others are important steps that will bring clarity to further actions and help us in preparing to receive Holy Communion. In this respect a strong warning is given in 1Cor 11:28-30: *"A man should examine himself first; only then should he eat of the bread and drink of the cup. He who eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord without recognizing the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why so many among you are sick and infirm, and why so many are dying."*

In considering all of these aspects one can be hard-pressed in thinking how to start or restart the healing process which is certainly unique for each of us. Hosea 4:6 makes this point when he says, *"My people perish for want of knowledge."* However, Jeremiah 31:31-34 furnishes a meditative starting point with his description of God's New Covenant: *"I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the Lord. All, from the least to the greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more."* Covenants were always sealed in blood and Jesus reminds us that he does so in Luke 22:19-20, *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you."*

The answer in starting or in continuing the healing process is within us with Jesus Christ as our guide when we approach him in humility. There can be pain and suffering involved so offer it up in repentance but stay hopeful and grateful. Recall (Luke 17:11-19), the healing of ten lepers; only one returned to give thanks to God, one most unlikely since he was a Samaritan, and Jesus said to him, *"Stand up and go; your faith has healed you."*

And when you receive the Eucharist meditate upon the New Covenant asking the Lord to write the meaning of his Word upon your heart. We have been promised guidance and we will receive it!

<http://melkplace.com>

