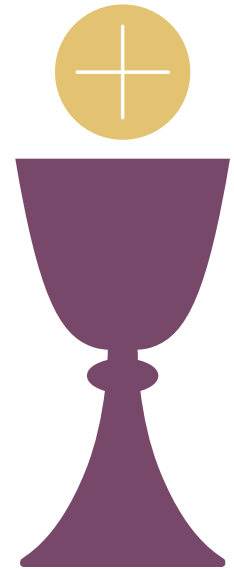


Healing Through the Eucharist

"A leper came to [Jesus]... and said... 'If you wish, you can make me clean.' Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, 'I do will it. Be made clean.' The leprosy left him immediately..." (Mark 1:40–41).



The gospel accounts record numerous occasions when Jesus healed the sick. Many people came to him for healing. The stories are poignant: the woman with a flow of blood, the boy with convulsions, a paralytic, a deaf-mute, a man born blind, a lame beggar, and more. Jesus came into a world awash with suffering and need. Because of the miraculous healings he performed, Jesus is sometimes called the Great Physician, or healer.

He did much more than restore ailing bodies to wellness, however. He also restored broken lives to wholeness, broken relationships to community, and sinners to forgiveness.

When the leper asks for healing, in the story from Mark's gospel account recounted above, Jesus touches him. The very action was shocking. Hanson's disease, or leprosy, rendered one untouchable. Anyone who touched a leper risked contracting and spreading this deadly and excruciating disease. Nevertheless, full of compassion, Jesus reaches out and touches him. What compassion was in that touch! What a profound gesture of human solidarity.

"I DO WILL IT"

Today, no less than during his lifetime on earth, Jesus wills to heal those who turn to him in faith. He wills to heal our hurts and restore our broken lives to wholeness. Sometimes, the healing Jesus wills is physical. There are attested exam-

ples of healing through prayer that indeed manifest a physical change that cannot be explained in any other way. Yet it is no less a miracle when the healing Jesus grants is spiritual.

The Church celebrates the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick for those who are seriously ill or near to death. In this sacrament, the priest lays hands on the sick and anoints them with blessed oil, and both the priest and the community pray for them. Whether this takes place at the bedside in a hospital with only one or two people present, or in the parish church with a large congregation, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is always an expression of the Church, as the Body of Christ, carrying out the ministry of healing.

Yet this is not the only occasion at which the healing power of Christ is manifest in the Church. In ordinary ways, by participation in the Eucharist, Jesus continues his work of healing and we are brought to wholeness and peace.

HEALING THROUGH THE EUCHARIST

How does the Eucharist bring us healing and peace? The following three examples show some of the many ways that the Eucharist is a conduit of Christ's healing love.

1 ■ *The Eucharist puts us in touch with the love and compassion of Jesus.* Christ comes to be with us out of

an infinite love for us. His love heals the hidden wounds we bear because of human rejection, loneliness, and fear. Sometimes physical healing results as well. Through the Eucharist Jesus enters our lives, and his very presence is healing. As food and drink nourish us, so the real presence of Jesus nourishes us. Holy Communion unites us with him in an intimate way.

The Christ we meet in the Eucharist is Emmanuel, God with us. By becoming human, our God has entered into the joys and struggles of human life and shared them. Our Savior knows fully the pain of suffering, rejection, humiliation, and death. He is the slain Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus is the Suffering Servant, of whom the prophet Isaiah wrote, “by his wounds, we were healed” (Isaiah 53:5). His compassion is infinite.

2 ■ *The Eucharist invites us to share in Christ’s Paschal Mystery.* Through dying and rising, Jesus redeemed all humanity, restoring us to friendship with God. This is one aspect of the Paschal Mystery. The other aspect of this mystery, however, is also crucial: we ourselves are called to share in Christ’s passover from death to life. We share in Christ’s Paschal Mystery by dying to sin and rising to the new life of grace. Every time we repent, we die to sin and rise to new life. Every time we experience self-denial for the sake of love, we die to self and rise to a life that is greater than ourselves. This liberating, paschal movement takes us out of the trap of living only for ourselves, and brings us into the freedom of the children of God (Romans 8:21). Our final passover, at the end of this life, into eternal life with God, is the ultimate healing.

3 ■ *The Eucharist heals our imagination, giving us new images of ourselves, our neighbor, and our world.* We generally imagine we are separate from other people, perhaps alone, and frequently at odds or in competition with one another. The sins of pride, envy, and hatred can reinforce the tensions among us, and deepen the loneliness we feel. When we see ourselves and one another as the world sees

us, we stand divided. At the table of the Eucharist, however, we glimpse ourselves and the world through the eyes of God—redeemed, whole, good, and at peace. The one bread and one cup of Communion are central signs of the unity to which we are called.

REFLECT

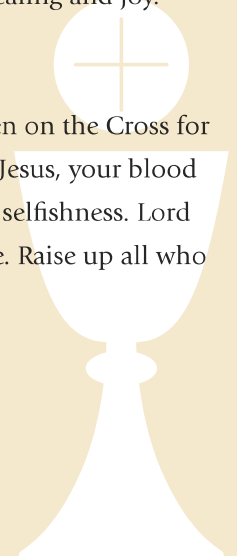
We can experience illness in body, mind, or spirit. Sometimes, too, a damaged relationship needs to be healed. Where do I need healing at the present time? Can I bring this need to prayer, inviting Jesus to heal me through the Eucharist?

ACT

Make time for someone who needs your help or simply your presence, such as an elderly family member, a sick friend, or someone you know who is going through a rough time. Your presence and interest can be an occasion of healing and joy.

PRAY

Lord Jesus, your body was broken on the Cross for us. Heal our brokenness. Christ Jesus, your blood was poured out for us. Heal our selfishness. Lord Jesus, God raised you to new life. Raise up all who are bowed down!



AUTHOR ■ Rita Ferrone is an award-winning writer and speaker in the areas of liturgy, catechesis, and renewal in the Roman Catholic Church.

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