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Faith and the Sick

by

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In the Bible, there are, as it were, two creations. One of long ago and one which is present, ongoing. The first is a long time ago in time. This seems to be a time before time, but that is impossible because there is not time before time, before creation. This long ago creation lost in the night of time is the object of a recital and of its very nature is tied to history. This recital speaks at the same time of creation and of the history of a people.

Proximate creation is no longer the object of a recital of the past but of a contemplation of the present: this creation speaks of permanence and of the actuality of creation. God is seen as permanent origin and not just as a beginning. Like the source of the river and the river. Or better, the mouth and the uttered word and the uttered word which is articulateness. If God removes His spirit (breath), all things die and return to dust (Psalms 104:28). We are, as it were, suspended in God, in a continuous and outgoing creation. My creation is also my future, continuously from God and in God.

Hence the enigma of time. In fact, time is really incomprehensible: the past no longer exists (which does not mean that the past is of no importance). It just does not exist as an actual reality: it exists only as a recital, a memory. The future is not yet. Between these two non-existants, there is a go-between who transforms the future, which arrives into a past which is no longer. The go-between is me, my life, which issues continuously from God. As it is instantaneous, the present who I am has no depth; it flows. And it is I who flow. What endures is a displacement. Thus every instant puts to death the previous moment, what I was. My yesterday, my this morning no longer exists. And yet, I endure. If each instant kills me, each instant gives me new birth. The line of time is the line of death/birth. There is our fragility and at the same time our

dependency on the principle of life from whom life flows, which we call God.

There is a clock which measures this time. Our body and our spirit intrinsically relate to our body. Our body is history, heavy with a past which has disappeared, and is at the mercy of a future which has not yet arrived. It is by a body that I live and life is a movement. Movement of death and of birth. My body is a sort of permanent resurrection.

All the recitals in the Gospel present us with a Christ who is antideath. He restores the image of God in the wounded human being. To restore the image of God is an act of creation. The healings in the Gospels are only signs and procure only a hiatus of time. Jesus did not cure everyone of His time nor of all time. Thus, these healings are not a solution. The Healing (Capital H) cannot be the healing of a man who has become a cadaver. A cadaver is not the image and likeness of God. It must be a real Healing at man's root, the *Healing of death*. With the healing of death, we pass from health to salvation. Creation becomes salvation. The resurrected Christ is all in all. He reassembles into Himself all humanity which is dispersed. And the body which the Spirit gives Him is the Church, reassembling humanity into one.

But we are all sick who do not hear and do not see. What permits us to hear and see is *love*, agape. There, all things are joined by the relationship of love which constitutes God in Himself. We can be images of God *only* if we accept to be relationships of love. To the degree that we love, we both are and are the image of God.

The body is our instrument of love but the body is ambiguous. The body is that by which I relate to everything and to everyone, but also by which I am separated from everything and everyone. My body is a solid object, opaque. My skin limits a space which is my space. The body is a frontier – that by which I communicate and by which I am separated. A line of demarcation. In case of sickness, the opaqueness is redoubled even when I am helped on all sides by others, even when others try to feel what I feel and suffer, yet they remain at the door. In a certain sense, everyone is alone with his sickness which in turn announces the ultimate and total solitude which is death.

If creation is a question of relationship, we live a compromised relationship. From birth to death, life relationship must become a continuous progress. How can we verify this when our body deteriorates? When the possibility of relationship diminishes?

Consider carefully the text of Luke 5:17-26. Jesus sees people lowering a sick man down to Him. Seeing *their* faith Jesus said: "My friend, your sins are forgiven." Then follows the cure. We can clearly understand "their faith" as the faith of those who lowered the man into the

house as well as the faith of the sick man. The faith is of all. The faith of the sick man is strengthened by the faith of those who assist him. Same scenario in Matthew 8:5-13: it is not just the faith of the servant which is in question but of a third party, the centurion. This is even clearer for the resurrection narrative. In the case of Lazarus, the words "faith" and "believe" appear in John time and again (John 11:15 [faith of the apostles]; verses 25, 26, 27,40 [faith of Martha]; verse 42 [faith of the crowd]). Where is the faith of Lazarus? It doesn't exist because he is dead and is never mentioned. Thus, this is a text about our solidarity. The faith of the one who loves the person attained with sickness comes to substitute for an impossible faith. The faith of those who accompany him opens a future for the sick person, to the dying person. Even if this faith is mute and is expressed by presence, attention, care, words of consolation which say other things. To have confidence in the future of this man or woman even to his/her absolute future – such is the faith which saves.

Do we not say that every sickness announces death? Death is coming and is on the way. But what is life? What does it mean to live?

The human person who is relationship in his entirety, is a tissue of relationships relating to everyone. There is a growth of being, growth of life when there is growth in relationship. Therefore the sick person can live more profoundly with his sickness if the sickness favors relationships. This poses some obstacles for the sick person as well as for those around him.

Sickness creates a hidden antagonism. The sick person can complicate out lives because he/she is sick and we are not. He demands by his very illness that we take care of him. This requires much patience and restraint.

On the part of the sick person there is also something to be done. He or she must accept himself as a sick person. He must accept to see himself as helpless, dependent, useless, fragile, even to the point of humiliation.

To accept to be seen utterly nude and helpless, materially helpless – all this is not normal and desired. Just the opposite. In our present life we have a tendency to hide behind masks to make a good impression on others. We use all kinds of methods for this from honors to clothes. In sickness, the masks come off because it is difficult to wear them when we are so weak and defenseless, not to say helpless. The sick person must forgive the healthy one who sees him in his poverty. Pardon for himself, pardon for others. Everything begins there.

But this forgiveness can only be built on hope. It is because I believe that this sick person is not abandoned by God, because I believe that he has an absolute future, that his/her suffering can have a Pascal meaning, it is because of all that, that I can glorify this sick person as I glorify God.

It's the same thing.