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# Christ, the Divine Physician and Healer

by

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*The following address was delivered to the Philippine Medical Association of Michigan at their 37th Inaugural Ball.*

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In the eleventh chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, we read where the imprisoned John the Baptist sent a deputation of his followers to Jesus with the question, "Are you 'he who is to come?' or do we look for another?" Jesus uses the experiential approach in His response:

Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, the deaf hear, dead men are raised to life and the poor have the good news preached to them.

(Matthew 11:4-5)

Five of the six proofs that Jesus uses to convince the Baptist and his followers that He is indeed the one whom they are searching for relate to bodily cures. Thus, it is not surprising that we find the Gospel accounts replete with such physical healings, whether it be the blind man, Bartimaeus of Mark 10:46 ff, or Jarius' daughter in Matthew 9:18 ff, or the ten lepers of Luke 17:14 ff, or Lazarus being raised from the dead in John 11:42 ff. As Jesus goes about announcing that His kingdom has come, the manifestation of that joyful Good News is the restoration of the sick, the diseased and even the dead to a state of wholeness.

A closer look reveals that there are basically three different classes of human illness that Jesus cured: first, there were organic diseases in which the structure or tissue of the body was damaged in some way, as for example the woman with the hemorrhage in Mark 5:25 ff. Secondly, there were functional disorders whereby the sickness was the result of one organ or part of the body not working properly, as in the cure of Peter's mother-

in-law of a fever in Mark 1:30 ff. Thirdly, there were psychic or mental illnesses which demonstrated themselves in personality disturbances such as with the demoniac who was possessed by a legion of evil spirits in Mark 5:8 ff.

As His clinical reputation grew, Jesus' practice built up. St. Mark implies that He even started keeping office hours in the evening:

When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases...

(Verses 32-34)

We also note that Jesus used a consistent method in His healings: He spoke, He used physical media (such as saliva, mud, etc.), He touched the afflicted persons, He showed compassion and He called upon the victim's faith.

When Jesus was approached by a leper asking for a cure in Mark 1:40 ff, the sacred text tells us:

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out His hand, touched him and said "I do will it. Be made clean."

(Verse 41)

As Jesus did, so too are physicians and nurses, hospital administrators and staff called to do. For no matter how sophisticated medical technology gets, true healing will always involve three very simple human elements: compassion, touch and conversation. If medical personnel are ready to place these elements at the service of their patients, then indeed they will become true healers after the example of the Divine Physician.

But these elements cannot be sustained at all times unless the health care professional follows Jesus' example in one more regard. St. Mark records that Jesus depended on deep, consistent, and regular prayer:

Rising very earlier before dawn, He left and went off to a deserted place, where He prayed.

(Mark 1:35)

Patients can be very demanding at times and terribly ungrateful at other moments. They can bring frivolous law suits against those who have done their very best to try and help them. Without a carefully cultivated spiritual life, the medical professional will end up being cynical or bitter about his or her work. Patients are but the point of departure, not the

source of one's ultimate satisfaction. To see each patient as a precious creature reflecting the mystery of God's love, one must keep his attention focused on God, on the spiritual at work in the natural order.

It is only in prayer that we come to discover who we are and what we are ultimately called to be. And yes, it is only in prayer that we come to discover who our patients are and what God is calling them to be.

Last week, a priest of the Archdiocese spoke at his mother's funeral mass. He singled out the doctor who cared for his Mom in the last weeks of her life. He related how that physician had spent three hours with his mother two days before she died, telling her about her condition, answering her questions and listening to her fears. That priest said that this physician proved to be more than a doctor, she was indeed a healer.

I believe that Jesus is calling each of you to be healers, too. I would like to conclude by quoting a passage that I found in preparing this brief reflection. The author is a Franciscan priest, who is also an M.D. He writes the following in his book entitled *The Healer's Calling*:

Health care is a supremely human enterprise. It is also divine. God comes to health care professionals daily as the one true source of all the healing with which they are so busily engaged. At the same time, God comes to doctors and nurses as the One who stands before them naked, in need of the healing powers that have been given to them. If they fail to recognize God in their midst, health care will lose its soul.

God comes into the midst of health care with all the immediacy of human encounters. As the scripture says, "the leprosy left him immediately, and he was made clean." (Verse 42) God's presence in the clinical encounter is truly a matter of then and there, now and here. It is not magic. It is not a sparkling wand waved over the world by a distant God. God is in the healing, and the healing is in our relationship with God.

(Daniel P. Sulmasy, *The Healer's Calling*  
New York: Paulist Press, 1997, page 18.)

It is good for us to gather and reflect on the special vocation to which God has called each of you. You share in the very ministry that Jesus exercised in announcing His Good News to the world. The joy of this Good News must be effected in healing love and service. Faith and prayer must definitely be a part of your professional ministry. As my priest friend said last week, you are called to be more than doctors or nurses, you are called to be healers after the image of Jesus, the Divine Healer.