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From the Editor's Desk: Hands

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From the Editor's Desk



Hands

As skilled physicians trained in the art of observation, how often have we seen the telltale signs of disease in the hands of countless patients—the swan neck deformities, ulnar deviations, boutonniere deformities, the telltale nodules of rheumatoid arthritis, the shiny, tough skin with cracking fingertips of scleroderma and the deformities of fingers of the untreated Dupuytren's contractures. As Abraham Lincoln said, "This is our stock in trade." We make the diagnosis, prescribe a course of treatment and go on unthinkingly to the "next diagnostic problem." How easy it is to forget the individuality and pain of that patient in the crush of everyday office practice. *Mea culpa!*

Recently, the reality of the above came home very forcibly to me while serving as a eucharistic minister. Many of the parishioners in Gesu parish, which is surrounded by Marquette University, are quite old and have been lifelong members of this urban parish. They are literally the "salt of the earth," filled with a rock-like Christian faith. I found myself entranced, looking at dozens of crossed hands into which I placed the Sacred Host after uttering, "the body of Christ." Many of these parishioners had the telltale signs of rheumatoid and osteoarthritic disease of the hands. The bodily pain of countless years was represented in these outstretched hands into which was placed the ultimate healer, Christ Himself. As I glanced into the eyes of the parishioners, it was evident that they were filled with pain, suffering and

longing. They gazed on the Sacred Host, seeking a surcease from the crushing burdens of everyday life. I prayed that Christ would relieve not only their physical but also their spiritual suffering, as they took Christ to themselves. When one witnesses and is united with a person in his or her physical and spiritual anguish, it is a very humbling experience. It makes one aware that Christ Himself is the true healer. It is only through Him that people will truly be healed in every dimension of their lives — spiritual as well as physical.

As physicians, we may use our skills and apply them well, but it is the God of all creation Who truly heals. This realization makes us want to recede and let Christ be more present to our patients through us. How slow we are to learn this simple truth, that is, that we are only simple instruments through which the Divine Healer works. As Catholic physicians it is incumbent upon us in our healing mission to our patients to become more Christlike and thus allow the Divine Healer to become more present to them. In this way will the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ be achieved, "through Him, with Him and in Him," as St. Paul would say. It is a mystery, but it is the very essence of our vocation as physicians.

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On another note, it is my pleasure to announce that the *Linacre Quarterly* placed third in the Catholic Press Association awards for scholarly journals. It is the first time *Linacre Quarterly* was entered in competition. The judges who awarded this prize had this to say:

For 50 years, *Linacre Quarterly* has vigorously described and fearlessly explored the moral issues that medicine faces in a world that is becoming more and more complex. *Linacre Quarterly* presents the best thought in the field in a clear, frank, responsible manner.

This award is treasured by your editorial staff as well as by the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds' board of directors. *Linacre* has been recognized for what it has always striven to be, a sound medico-moral journal representing in unequivocal terms the ordinary magisterial teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

— John P. Mullooly, M.D.