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"Physician, Heal Thyself - Physician As Person"

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Some 14 years ago I was privileged to meet a retired orthopedic surgeon from the Midwest. He had been doubly blessed with gifts of healing. Through his education, skill and practice, he extended to many patients the healing gifts available in his medical profession. As he lived out his life, he became more and more conscious of the rich spiritual heritage he received in baptism and the healing gift of the Spirit available to him. His hands and heart, carrying the wonderful sensitivity from years of working with the human body and person, opened themselves up to carry the healing power of God working and ministering through him. His daily prayer to the Lord was, “Good morning, Lord! What are we going to do today?” Patient after patient would come, and to the surgeon, each was sent by the Lord, and the Christ in him was healing. If ever I felt the touch of Jesus upon me, it was through his touch.

Those of us privileged to be involved in a helping profession or ministry, also share in a profound way in the healing ministry of the Lord Jesus. It is not just by aptitude or choice that each of us may be here in our present capacity, but also, perhaps by vocation — a call from God to be a special sign of His presence among His people. The present day challenges us to live a more conscious response to the call received in baptism: the professed belief to live in relationship to Jesus as Lord of our lives.

The physician and others in ministries of healing, carry in their person natural and acquired skills, talents and aptitudes to fulfill the desired goal in their life through some special service to those who are in need. That service can be marked with an image of impersonalism — providing services but not treating persons; maybe cloaking more selfish reasons for service rendered, or stepping on or over others to acquire some coveted gain. Patients may be used or taken from to reach such selfish goals and fail to receive the full benefit of the healing gifts available.
Over and above the natural and acquired skills, those who have taken seriously their faith walk, who are spiritually sensitive to the Spirit poured forth in their hearts and knowledgeable of the grace inherent in the sacraments, bring other powerful gifts to their professional service. In this arena of daily activities, the physician and others are sent as witnesses and as instruments of the healing presence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus for the upbuilding of the body, the people of God. St. Paul reminds us in 1 Cor. 12 and in Rom. 12:6: "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them..." (vs. 9-13); "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord." The Spirit exists in us in a manner to be seen in our works and in our lives. In 2 Tim. 1:7 we read, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, and love and self control."

Frequently this aspect of a person's life, his love relationship with God, his willingness to be a channel of the Spirit within him/her is kept hidden. In reality, if it is a vital dynamic relationship, it cannot be hidden. It just is.

—The love of one's family, one's wife, husband, or others reflects in some way in our contacts with other persons. An individual who is loved and who in turn loves cannot cloak this gift in an outer shell. "God is love," St. John reminds us, and everywhere this love is experienced by those who have eyes and ears to hear. Neither is the lack of well-being in a person — bitterness, anger, arrogance or egocentricity — masked. Unfortunately, or fortunately, our shadow is only hidden from our own awareness. Most others see it only too plainly.

Christians Reflect Jesus

More and more Christians are being called out of hiding to reflect to the world the Jesus they know as friend, Lord and Savior. To touch another's life for good personally and in a professional manner is commendable, even when it is the essence of the commandment of love. To share with another the healing Christ within may even more powerfully affect their lives in an ongoing healing process. To provide a procedure for a patient then to allow the Spirit to pray through you for whatever else that person may need, has tremendous healing effects. In Sirach, Ch. 38, a beautiful tribute to the physician is given:

Honor the physician with the honor due him, according to your need of him, for the Lord created him; for healing comes from the Most High, and he will receive a gift from the king... And he gave skill to men that might be glorified in his marvelous works. By them he heals and takes away pain; the pharmacist makes of them a compound. His works will never be finished; and from him health is upon the face of the earth.

What brings together or makes operable the healing skills received and the healing gifts of the Spirit given in and through the sacraments? How does one bring the relationship of nature and grace into the healing ministry? There is a bridge from what has been received and what is given.
This connection must be strong and fortified and in good working condition; it is the doctor or individual as a human person with recognized human needs, spiritual needs, social needs. To be able to cross over from the natural skills of the physician to the spiritual gifts inherited through grace, healthy, humble attitudes are paramount. In Romans 3: 9-12, St. Paul writes:

...I have already charged that all men both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong, no one does good, not even one.’

Continuing on in the same chapter, Paul sums up his thought in verse 23: “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” The experience each of us has in living our individual unique lives bears out the words of scripture just quoted. For the most part, we are all too aware of what we cannot do, what and who we are in our human frailty, and what we cannot be in light of so many challenges and demands being made upon us. All the more so do we experience this in our effort to live the gospel message. There is so vast a world of knowledge and so magnificent are the discoveries in the universe that even the mystery of one human life is overwhelming, so much so that we can hardly maintain a stance other than one of humility and awe as the potentiality of life unfolds around us day after day.

Capacity to Share

Because of the human and divine heritage we have in common, each member of the human family has the capacity to share in self-development or in self-corruption. Paul tells us in Romans 7, “...I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” (Rom. 7:15-18-20) The freedom that is gift to us puts upon us an awesome responsibility in choosing what is to our good and the good of others, both temporally and eternally. Good and evil exist within us and around us. Body and spirit enter into a life-long relationship to be transformed into the fullness of stature which is our call. There is a complexity to our makeup and destiny — more accurately described as mystery since it is beyond us to figure out or control. Yet, there is a simplicity, too, in the ultimate truth of what we long for and seek for fulfillment. Implanted in every human heart is the desire to seek after the good — seek after God in “...the hope that one might feel after Him and find Him. Yet He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:27-28)

“Physician, heal thyself” is in itself an impossibility. Rather, it may better be stated, “Physician, open up yourself to be healed.” Jesus is the healer. All come before Him to be healed. We read in Jer. 17:14, “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.” From what
must a person in a healing profession be healed? So many look to doctors, priests, psychologists, counselors, lawyers and religious to have the answers to the riddle of living life more fully. It is frequently assumed that such professionally trained and competent persons are experienced in the "art of living" and have worked out their personal problems. Many feel they have, and therefore can do no wrong, or in some way are elevated to another plain above the average human condition. Sometime in life the true self breaks through the unconscious and demands the removal of masks.

The psalmist writes a bold request in Ps. 139 when he invites, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts? And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Ps. 139:23-24. It takes courage and sincerity of heart, even after asking, to listen to what God might have to say as we bare our lives before Him — our anxieties, motives, actions, fears. Just as professionally and scientifically one monitors the operation of health support systems, observes medication intake and reactions, so the Christian man or woman, desirous of being healed of spiritual blindness and weaknesses, reflects on what it is he or she is doing, why and what effects are being felt through this pattern of behavior, attitude or course of action. The strength of the bridge is in how well I know myself and how honest I am when I detect that my needs must be replenished.

One is sensitized to the needs of others when, through practice, one has learned sensitivity to his or her own needs. When physically we are depleted of energy, when long hours have created hunger and thirst within us, when too serious a string of events or encounters weighs on us emotionally, we attend to rest, exercise, diversion, a hearty meal, laughter, hobbies and play; we once again are uplifted and feel replenished. Manna has fed us; we partook of the bread of life and can resume our journey. How critical spiritual infilling is to the whole person. The body, mind, emotions are satisfied perhaps partially, but the spirit is frequently an afterthought. As is has been said, "If one is too busy to pray, one is too busy!" The replenishment of one's spirit life is often treated as a luxury; it is nice to have time for, but something has to fall by the wayside and God doesn't seem to mind! God is always at work teaching us about our ways through the grace of the Spirit. There is a resistance in all of us to the self-awareness that "our ways are not His ways". (Is. 55:8) Grace abounds and, when recognized and embraced, works for good in us.

The psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck, in his best seller, The Road Less Traveled, suggests that we often fail to take advantage of grace because we are not fully aware of its presence... we don't value the gift given since our eyes are not open to expect it. Our great tendency is even more to label and control things and to think of them as separate entities; consequently, we fail to let them happen in a natural synchronistic way. He speaks of the "miracle of evolution" in human spirit that continues to evolve where the human body does not continue to grow. Unlimited opportunities for
spiritual growth are given in one's lifetime. Moreover, we are called to a
greater degree of spiritual competence than we allow ourselves to even
dream or desire. There is the struggle, the tension in us toward the urge to
grow and the resistance not to let growth happen.

**Recognizing One's Self**

To come to a place of "knowing" myself is to come to recognize who I
am. This means to actually "re-know" that this has been a part of my life all
along, buried deep in the conscious, now brought into the light. I can
become aware and then act. To educate literally means "to bring out of", to
lead forth from what already is known from within. Life is a process of
being healed ... a process of becoming who we already are in God's eyes.
Our commitment to wholeness, to being healed, to holiness, flows out of
our identity as a son, a daughter of God. It flows out of the covenant that
was made with God in our Baptism and to which we ascribe each day in the
lived-out relationship of love we have with God. We entered into a death to
sin commitment, the call to walk in newness of life as explained in
Romans, Ch. 6:6. "We know that our old self was crucified with Him so
that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be
enslaved to sin" ... (vs. 11) "so you also must consider yourselves dead to
sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Col. 3:5 says, "Put to death therefore
what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires and
covetousness which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is
coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put
them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander and foul talk from your
mouth. Do not lie to one another ... But on then, as God's chosen ones,
holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and
patience, forebearing one another and if one has a complaint against
another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also
must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything
together in perfect harmony." Col. 3:5-9; 12-14.

The best proof of the existence of original sin in the world, Dr. Peck
states in his book, is laziness. Laziness works against the necessary
discipline needed to grow. It fights to avoid the suffering that is necessarily
a part of every one's life. It resists the pain involved in loving, risking,
extending one's self for another. "Laziness is love's opposite", he says. It
isn't that I don't love myself or another person, but I don't love myself
enough to exert the necessary effort to enable myself or another to grow
spiritually. Energy expended in many activities in a person's life may be
even more than is healthy for that person, but at the same time one could
be woefully lazy in loving one's self enough to grow spiritually. The call of
Scripture is to seek first the kingdom of God. Laziness is that force within
us that pushes us down so that we do not evolve spiritually. Dr. Peck feels
that for many people, the form this laziness takes is fear, "a fear of change
in the status quo". Something might be lost if one looks too closely at
his/her chosen path; a change may be involved, new disciplines,
responsibilities, a new sense of loving and committing one's self to others. Yes, no doubt, it would call for a dying to an area of security, to walk into the unknown, requiring new faith and trust in the God Who has the ultimate say in my life. To continue to resist the light and to avoid having one's works brought into honest scrutiny is evil. Of evil, Dr. Peck has much to say. A new best seller, *People of the Lie. The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, confronts this dark side in all of us. Evil is that which kills the spirit and only when we recognize it in its many forms and call it by name, are we able to heal it. The author defines evil "as the exercise of political power, that is, the imposition of one's will upon others by overt or covert coercion, in order to avoid extending one's self for the purpose of nurturing spiritual growth. Ordinary laziness is non love; evil is anti love."1

So much goes into a life to enable it to be lived wholesomely, holily—with head and heart longing for a peace and harmony in all the facets of human living and in deep loving relationships.

A heart specialist shared with me that it is not uncommon for patients to confess their wrongdoings, their sins, in his office. They felt compelled to tell someone who cared and who could help them. Although he was at first uncomfortable in the role of "priest-minister," he recommended that those spiritually trained for this sickness in the soul be seen. Because of the physical symptoms, the doctor was the one upon whom to unload the burden of guilt. Often such an exposure, light breaks through a wounded soul, the weight lifts and physical healing can begin. In Luke, 5:17-26 the paralyzed man was healed when Jesus forgave his sins. To be forgiven, to forgive another, to forgive one's self has lifted many an anguished person of spiritual, mental, emotional and then physical bondage. Sir. 38:15 states: "He who sins before His Maker, may he fall into the care of a physician." May he fall into the care of a physician who has grown sensitive to his/her own human, spiritual, relational needs, wise and compassionate in listening to and responding to those needs being replenished, who continues to seek the face of God. Such a person shares in the heart of the Divine Physician Who collaborates in the healing process of every other he/she touches physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Reference