

Sunday Homily

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

27 JUNE 2021

YEAR B

"If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."

Mark 5:28

Illustration

Over recent years, the Church's ministry of healing has undergone a massive renewal. It has been present from the earliest times as an essential part of the pastoral ministry. Now it has been rediscovered. It receives great emphasis, and is widely practised. It is difficult to know precisely what the results are. Some spectacular claims have been made, supported by what appears to be anecdotal evidence. On the other hand, there have been disappointments, and some occasions reported when healing sessions have gone tragically wrong.

So we need to be cautious in our choice of words. Healing is not a word used in medical circles, at least not in the active sense of bringing about a beneficial change in someone's condition. Healing is something that happens from within, for example, when a wound heals. Probably no doctor would claim to have healed anyone, not, at least, in the biblical use of the word. The most a doctor would claim is to have prescribed a course of treatment which led to the patient being cured.

Gospel Teaching

So, as we read that Jesus actually healed people, we need to consider what it was he was doing. On some occasions his ministry seems to have been confined to curing people of their illness, for example, leprosy or epilepsy. On others, he appears to have been confronting something more deep-seated within them. He had the ability to penetrate beyond the presenting symptoms of the illness and perceive personal, spiritual and emotional malaise.

We see examples of this in today's Gospel. The crowd formed round Jesus as he responded to Jairus' request to visit and heal his daughter. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle, the woman who was suffering from chronic bleeding approached him. "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately, she was aware that "she was healed of her disease" and, equally, Jesus was "aware that power had gone forth from him". He challenged the crowd, "Who touched me?" and the woman "came in fear and trembling and... told him the whole truth". The moment was cathartic for her. She felt cleansed and relieved that she had been able to confront the truth about herself. She was healed not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually within herself as well.

The healing of Jairus' daughter carries much less medical detail, about either the cause of the illness, or what Jesus actually did. We only know that he took her by the hand, and told her to get up. We have no clue as to whether this brought about an inner as well as an outer healing. The really significant change seems to have occurred amongst the bystanders. Their jeers and laughter when Jesus first appeared turned to amazement when the child got up and walked. Whatever happened to her, it was those around her who were healed.

So today's Gospel gives an example of healing in the person cured, and an example of a cure with others being healed. For a third alternative, we need to look, not at the Gospels, but at people facing illness amongst us today, whether at home or in hospital. Probably most of us can think of someone who is not going to get better, for whom nothing more can be done. From a medical point of view, no further treatment is available, a cure is out of the question. Yet such a person can be, and often is, a source of hope and inspiration to their friends, family and carers. Facing death, they know resurrection. Embracing death, they are healed.

Application

One final thought. The words healing and wholeness stem from the same word in Old English, and are closely related. None of us is whole. None of us is what we could be, or should be, or, indeed, want to be, on our better days. All of us suffer from dis-ease. All of us are in need of healing. When we have the courage to see ourselves as we are, to acknowledge our shortcomings, and our need of forgiveness and acceptance, we open ourselves to the healing touch of Christ. "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Jesus replied, "Your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease."