

Sunday Homily

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

14 JUNE 2020

YEAR A

“Cure the sick, raise the dead,
cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.”

Matthew 10:8

Illustration

Healing today is big business. Hospitals get bigger and better, equipped with the latest technology science can invent and money can buy. New treatments, new drugs, new approaches are being pioneered all the time. Such breakthroughs take time and energy. The buildings, the medicines, the research are all expensive. State-run medical services find it ever more difficult to fund the treatments which are needed and waiting lists grow longer. The private sector is being called upon to fill gaps. Morale is rarely high. Practitioners burn out or turn to other professions, frustrated by the limitations placed upon them.

Many choose to work elsewhere, sometimes in more lucrative areas of the world. But others choose poorer countries where, with many fewer resources, there can still be some sense of a job worth doing. Their patients can be met as fully human beings, combining physical and inner healing to ensure maintenance of their dignity in trying circumstances. Patients in the Western world often feel reduced to ciphers, as “cases” defined by their medical problem rather than as a person, an individual. They are reduced to feeling just the sum of their individual parts, like a car in for servicing, their emotional and spiritual needs being left to be dealt with by friends and family. Despite some forays into alternative medicine, the Western world’s dominant model of healing continues to treat us like biological machines.

Gospel Teaching

Jesus draws an essential connection between his preaching of the kingdom and the healing of the whole person. The context for his sending out of the disciples is his distress at the state of the crowds who have come to him with their many needs. They are described, in Matthew 9:36, as “harassed and helpless,” a fair description of the occupants of a modern hospital’s busy ward. Jesus complains to his disciples that there are not enough labourers to work at healing their ills.

In response he calls them together and gives them a special commission. To begin with, he does not send them to the world at large, but to their own compatriots, the people of Israel. Those to whom the promises of the Old Testament were

made, promises which included that of the Father who would bear them up on eagles' wings, watch over them, guard them forever, make of them a consecrated nation.

For us today such language may seem rather detached, even ethereal, when we are faced with the problems of daily life. But what Jesus is asking of his disciples is more down to earth. In order to preach the kingdom they must first of all offer healing, whether of evil spirits or of the physical ailments which affect those they meet. To preach the kingdom is to offer healing of the whole person. The power to do this can only come from Christ himself, who is the fulfilment of all the Old Testament promises.

Application

The Church has always been involved with physical as well as spiritual healing. Medieval monasteries began the care which was later taken up by the great nursing orders, the forerunners of today's medical services. Since the State and private business have taken over the provision of physical care, the Church's role has become more directed towards the "inner" person, through chaplaincy provision and visiting. Disappointment with the depersonalisation in many areas of medicine today and the apparent split between physical and spiritual care has led to a higher profile for alternative methods of healing. Homeopathy, acupuncture, shiatsu, reflexology and others combine the two aspects of healing. The search for elements not provided by common medical practice may stem from people feeling that their whole person is not being addressed, even though we know that mind, body and spirit interact all the time.

We could say that the kingdom is not being preached as Jesus intended. Society is failing to bring people the fullest healing available to them. How do we remedy this? First by lobbying those who have the power to reassess and change the systems within our society. But also by ensuring that we treat our sisters and brothers as whole people, precious in their totality, not just the bits of them that we can cope with. Our work is to bring Christ's wholeness to all people, regardless of difference, becoming his true disciples, bringing the kingdom to all those that we meet, especially the "harassed and helpless".