

The God Who Speaks

9: Healing Our World

Opening Prayer and Welcome

God our loving Father,
You made us your children in baptism.
Pour out on us the gifts of your Holy Spirit.
Help us as a parish to know the paths we must follow
so as to build up your kingdom.
Teach us to grow in faith,
to encourage one another with words of hope,
and to care for your family with love.
Let us bear witness to the Good News,
and be faithful followers of your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit
for ever and ever.
Amen

Introduction to the Theme

When we are too busy, it's hard to step back and get some perspective on things: everything seems to be 'right in our face'. The result comes to us as a feeling of anxiety: everything feels like too much, too fast, and sometimes it can feel as though we crawl from one holiday to another just to get a break from it all. It's a striking contrast with the way things are described as being in the Garden of Eden, where there is harmony, peace, calm.

If we were to set side-by-side our images of the Garden of Eden, and our world and our lives as we live them today, would it really help us to see what the problem is? We can talk about 'original sin' - what Adam and Eve did - but does that help us see our own world more clearly and what we can do about our own lives?

Take our planet as an example: we are told that it is in crisis, that we all have to change things fast if the damage isn't to be irreversible. But it's hard to get perspective: to see the problem; to see what we can do to make the world a better place for our children and the many whose lives will follow ours.

Scripture Reading

Matthew 8:1-3;5-10,12-17 (JB)

After he had come down from the mountain large crowds followed him. A leper now came up and bowed low in front of him. 'Sir,' he said 'if you want to, you can cure me.' Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said, 'Of course I want to! Be cured!' And his leprosy was cured at once.

When he went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said 'my servant is lying at home paralysed, and in great pain.' 'I will come myself and cure him' said Jesus. The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself, and have soldiers under

me; and I say to one man: Go, and he goes; to another: Come here, and he comes; to my servant: Do this, and he does it.' When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, 'I tell you solemnly, nowhere in Israel have I found faith like this'. And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go back, then; you have believed, so let this be done for you.' And the servant was cured at that moment.

And going into Peter's house Jesus found Peter's mother-in-law in bed with fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on them.

That evening they brought him many who were possessed by devils. He cast out the spirits with a word and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: He took our sicknesses away and carried our diseases for us.

Discussion

We know the centurion's words well, because we say them at every Mass; we used to say 'Lord, I am not worthy to receive you' - and the words could indeed be translated in that way - but the more literal translation which we now use at Mass reminds us of this story and about this centurion's faith.

The gospels tell us time and time again that Jesus healed people: it led many to think of him as a 'wonder-worker'. But healing in our world is not an extraordinary *wonder*; it is not magic: it is the nature of our world to be always healing and for thousands of years we have recognised the healing power of nature in plants, but also in places that bring healing, like mountain-sides, lakes, and the ocean. Like joy, *healing* is the action of God in our world, not as something magical, but by the very presence of God *in us* and *for us*.

*You may find it helpful to sit with the text in silence for a little while. Then, in a spirit of helping one another, you could share your thoughts and discuss with one another what you notice in this text from the Bible. **Listen to one another** because God also speaks through our sisters and brothers in Christ, and through us.*

You can use the following to help you, or explore other thoughts that come to mind:

Matthew tells us that '[Jesus] went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sicknesses among the people' (Matthew 4:23). Why, do you think, was healing central to Jesus' message? What, do you think, can we learn from Jesus' work of healing? What is your own experience of being healed in your own life?

A quiet reflection

Close your eyes and remain in quiet for a little while. Ask yourself if you can feel God's Presence right now. Or perhaps you can think back to something that happened today, or yesterday, that - on reflection - says to you that God is near, perhaps that God has spoken to you. Or it could be in a memory that comes to mind, where you can say, perhaps, that God was close?

Jesus is never a distant figure in the gospel stories: he is always intimately involved with people and with what is happening. And the symbol of **touch** is crucial: when Jesus touches a person, and they are healed, it is not magic: it is a sign of God healing the world. The gospel writers are careful to make this clear and they often use words like **sign** both when describing what Jesus did and what he said.

Healing is also a central theme of the Old Testament: the whole story of salvation is the story of God healing his people. But there are also many beautiful passages in the prophetic writings - like the words of Isaiah 53:5 mentioned in the gospel passage we listened to earlier - and the story of Tobit tells of God's healing through the angel Raphael, whose name means 'God heals'.

It is not just about Jesus healing people two thousand years ago; nor indeed just about the apostles of the early Church, about whom almost the first thing we hear after the coming of the Holy Spirit is that they healed people: we too are called to heal the world. It is a real challenge of courage, vision and faith to both recognise that healing is not just needed but that it is not our role to 'sit on the sidelines admiringly' but to ourselves be the hands that do the work of healing. As Saint Teresa of Ávila said: *Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body: Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

Scripture Reading

Acts 3:1-10 (JB)

Once, when Peter and John were going up to the Temple for the prayers at the ninth hour, it happened that there was a man being carried past. He was a cripple from birth; and they used to put him down every day near the Temple entrance called the Beautiful Gate so that he could beg from the people going in. When this man saw Peter and John on their way into the Temple he begged from them. Both Peter and John looked straight at him and said, 'Look at us'. He turned to them expectantly, hoping to get something from them, but Peter said, 'I have neither silver nor gold, but I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!' Peter then took him by the hand and helped him to stand up. Instantly his feet and ankles became firm, he jumped up, stood, and began to walk, and he went with them into the Temple, walking and jumping and praising God. Everyone could see him walking and praising God, and they recognised him as the man who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. They were all astonished and unable to explain what had happened to him. Everyone came running towards them in great excitement, to the Portico of Solomon, as it is called, where the man was still clinging to Peter and John. When Peter saw the people he addressed them, 'Why are you so surprised at this? Why are you starting at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or holiness? You are Israelites, and it is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, who has glorified his servant Jesus, the same Jesus you handed over and then disowned in the presence of Pilate after Pilate had decided to release him. It was you who accused the Holy One, the Just One, you who demanded the reprieve of a murderer while you killed the prince of life. God, however, raised him from the dead, and to that fact we are the witnesses; and it is the name of Jesus which, through our faith in it, has brought back the strength of this man whom you see here and who is well known to you. It is faith in that name that has restored this man to health, as you can all see.

Discussion

The gospel writers - especially Matthew - saw that Jesus came to fulfil the teachings of the prophets. They saw how Jesus, by healing the sick and freeing those possessed by evil, was the fulfilment of God's promise to his people. Jesus was the fulfilment of an old promise, but he was also something completely new, that had never been seen before. For the gospel writers and for Jesus' earliest followers, he was not just another prophet: Jesus didn't just *tell* about God's work - Jesus **did God's work** directly and immediately. And when Jesus rose from death, his followers understood that the same work that Jesus had done was now in their hands for them to do *in the name of Jesus*.

You may find it helpful to sit with the text in silence for a little while. Then, in a spirit of helping one another, you could share your thoughts and discuss with one another what you notice in this text

from the Bible. **Listen to one another** because God also speaks through our sisters and brothers in Christ, and through us.

You can use the following to help you, or explore other thoughts that come to mind:

What do you feel as you listen to this story of Peter and John healing the man?

Does the story encourage you? Does it frighten you?

It is easy to think that Peter and John were special, but how do you feel called to bring healing to our world?

How, do you feel, does your parish community bring healing to others?

The Church Teaches

“LAUDATO SI’ mi Signore - “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of [his] beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs”.

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Romans 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and receive life and refreshment from her waters.

(Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 1-2, 24 May 2015)

Read this passage again and sit with it for a short while in silence.

Then feel free to share with one another the thoughts that come to your heart.

Closing Prayer

We thank you, Gracious Father, for this time of reflection.
We ask you to give us a fresh understanding of your Presence in our lives.
Strengthen us, we pray, in our faith
Help us to be present to each moment
So that we may see You and hear Your Voice
Everywhere and in all things and all people.
Give us hearts and minds that seek the face of Jesus,
And help us, through the power of the Holy Spirit,
To be always grateful for your blessings,
For the gracious gift of Your Presence.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ
In the unity of your Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Reading suggestion

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (On Care for our Common Home), 24 May 2015. This important letter to the Church and to the world teaches about our Christian (and, indeed, *human!*) duty to care for and to heal our world.