

July 11, 2021

Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

We heard some very encouraging words from the Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will . . .”* God has **chosen us** to be holy and without blemish before him. God chose us not because we are holy, rather God chose us so that we could *become* holy and blameless in his sight. We become holy and blameless in God’s sight through the forgiveness and healing that we experience in his son Jesus Christ.

Notice that in English the word “holy” and the word “whole” are closely related. They both come from the Anglo-Saxon root word, “hal”. The word “Healing is also derived from that same root word which means “to restore to a state of wholeness, soundness or integrity.” “Holy” means “wholeness” and “purity of mind and spirit.” To be whole, to be holy, to be healed go together.

People with wounds or who are sick need healing. One way to describe sin is as a wound to our soul, a sickness of our spirit and our mind. All of us in one way or another, are wounded. God wants us to be holy and blameless before him and to experience his healing. It is little wonder that the gospels and especially the Gospel of Mark are filled with stories of Jesus healing the sick and forgiving sinners. The healing ministry is central to our mission as church. God calls each one of us through his word this today, to participate actively in the healing power of Jesus Christ. First to receive the healing that he offers, and then to be “wounded healers”, to be instruments of the healing power we have received. God invites us experience his healing and then to share our story of how God healed us and to encourage people to turn to God in their need. Even to invite them to the sacraments of healings.

Notice that I said the *sacraments* of healing because there is more is more than one. The first sacrament of healing is baptism, because it heals the wound that was caused by Original sin. It is the door that opens us to the other sacraments. I receive the sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the most common sacrament of

healing, almost every day. I receive the sacrament of reconciliation every month for the forgiveness of my sins. I have received the anointing of the sick only twice in my 63 years of life. Even for those who can't receive the sacraments, Christ's healing power and "salvation is bound to the sacraments, but is not bound by them," can be offered through prayer. During the pandemic, we have offered the anointing of the sick individually for those who needed it but not in the communal celebration of the Mass. Instead, we have offered the prayer of healing from the book of blessings. The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick "is the proper sacrament for those Christians whose health is seriously impaired by sickness or old age." This prayer blessing has healing power for those who viewed online along with those who were present at the Mass. Next month we will be able to return to the communal celebration of the sacrament of the sick at the first Saturday 9:00 am Mass. Fr. Ben and I will do what Jesus instructed the Apostles to do, to anoint the sick with oil to heal them. The sacraments are important because they offer the physical presence of God's salvation, mercy and healing through his Son Jesus Christ.

When we open up our lives to the physical presence of Christ, healing happens in one way or another. 30 years ago, I anointed a man in his forties who was dying of AIDS and had been away from the Church for many years. He came back through the encouragement of a friend. He said that he felt the power of the Holy Spirit rush through his body with the anointing and that he felt a tremendous sense of peace. He died just a few days later. The disease took him, but not the inner healing and peace God gave him. Healing of the body is a tremendous gift, yet it does not last forever. We will all die one day. The peace that only God can give is the gift that is eternal. That deepest sense of healing is that for which we all long.