

Fr. Curtis Miller February 6-7, 2021 Homily for the 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Healing the sick is one of the main activities we think of Jesus doing during His ministry. In today's Gospel reading, we hear about Jesus healing St. Peter's mother-in-law, and the crowds of sick people who flocked to Him when they heard what had happened. But when we think about Jesus' healings, there are a couple important things to keep in mind.

First, Jesus didn't come to be a one-man hospital. If He did, even though His miracles are impressive, they would leave something to be desired. There were still many sick people in the world whom Jesus did not cure. So why did Jesus come? He came to save our souls, to heal our spiritual wounds. Often, Jesus' miracles of physical healing were demonstrations to show His power to forgive sins and heal souls. This is explicitly the case when Jesus healed the paralytic lowered through the roof by his friends. Jesus healed his paralysis so that the crowd would know that He had the authority to forgive sins, too. That's why, even if we pray for a physical healing and God doesn't seem to answer our prayer, He is answering it in a deeper way by healing our souls.

Secondly, when Jesus heals us or delivers us from something bad, the bad thing doesn't just magically disappear. Jesus takes it upon Himself. Let's think about that when we complain that Jesus isn't answering our prayers for healing and deliverance sooner. It isn't cheap and easy for Jesus to heal us. It costs Him something: His very life, given for us on the cross. That's the meaning of today's Gospel acclamation: "Jesus took away our infirmities and bore our diseases."

But if God loves us, then why does He ever allow us to suffer illnesses and other misfortunes? Because He can use those trials as part of our training, making us stronger and more faithful. Consider the athletes who will be playing in the Super Bowl this weekend. They didn't just say, "I think I'll go play at the Super Bowl." No. They had to put in long hours of practice and making sacrifices for years just to get to this point.

Why should it be any different when we're doing something even more important than playing in the Super Bowl, namely being a disciple of Jesus? We have to be willing to put in the time praying, practicing acts of humble charity, studying our faith and sharing it with others. If we do that, by God's grace, then we can win the greatest championship: living a holy life and going to heaven.

St. Paul Miki and his companions, whose feast day is today/ was yesterday, show us that kind of commitment. They were Japanese Christians in the 16th Century, just a few short years after missionaries first brought the Gospel of Jesus to their homeland. The emperor became suspicious of these foreign missionaries, expelled them, and forbid any of his subjects from practicing this new religion. Yet many Japanese Christians

refused to give up the faith they had had the joy of receiving. The emperor ordered the arrest of St. Paul Miki and twenty-five other Japanese Christians, to make an example of them. They were beaten, tortured, and forced to march hundreds of miles through many villages, until they were finally brought to Nagasaki and crucified. St. Paul and his companions did not complain about their suffering, nor did they lose faith. Instead, they professed forgiveness for their persecutors and the example of their courage had the opposite of the intended effect: many more Japanese people were inspired to become Christians. Though the Church was forced into hiding, when missionaries were finally able to return, four hundred years later, they were surprised to find a vibrant community of Japanese Christians who had kept the faith in secret for generations. This was especially true at Nagasaki, the site of their martyrdom.

When we are forced to suffer, whether due to persecution or ill health, let us not complain and lose faith. Rather, let us live out our faith all the more boldly. Perhaps our strong faith will inspire others, too.