

GOSPEL

Mark 1:29-39

On leaving the synagogue, Jesus went with James and John straight to the house of Simon and Andrew. Now Simon's mother-in-law had gone to bed with fever, and they told him about her straightaway. He went to her, took her by the hand and helped her up. And the fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils. The whole town came crowding round the door, and he cured many who were suffering from diseases of one kind or another; he also cast out many devils, but he would not allow them to speak, because they knew who he was.

In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. Simon and his companions set out in search of him, and when they found him they said, 'Everybody is looking for you.' He answered, 'Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring country towns, so that I can preach there too, because that is why I came.' And he went all through Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out devils.

REFLECTION OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

8 February 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Gospel today (cf. Mk 1: 29-39) in close continuity with last Sunday's presents to us Jesus who, after preaching on the Sabbath in the synagogue of Capernaum, heals many sick people, beginning with Simon's mother-in-law. Upon entering Simon's house, he finds her lying in bed with a fever and, by taking her hand, immediately heals her and has her get up. After sunset, he heals a multitude of people afflicted with ailments of every kind. The experience of healing the sick occupied a large part of Christ's public mission and invites us once again to reflect on the meaning and value of illness, in every human situation.

Despite the fact that illness is part of human experience, we do not succeed in becoming accustomed to it, not only because it is sometimes

truly burdensome and grave, but also essentially because we are made for life, for a full life. Our "internal instinct" rightly makes us think of God as fullness of life indeed, as eternal and perfect Life. When we are tried by evil and our prayers seem to be in vain, then doubt besets us and we ask ourselves in anguish: what is God's will? We find the answer to this very question in the Gospel. For example, in today's passage we read that Jesus "healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons" (Mk 1: 34); in another passage from St Matthew it says that Jesus "went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Mt 4: 23). Jesus leaves no room for doubt: God whose Face he himself revealed is the God of life, who frees us from every evil. The signs of his power of love are the healings he performed. He thus shows that the Kingdom of God is close at hand by restoring men and women to their full spiritual and physical integrity. I maintain that these cures are signs: they are not complete in themselves but guide us towards Christ's message, they guide us towards God and make us understand that man's truest and deepest illness is the absence of God, who is the source of truth and love. Only reconciliation with God can give us true healing, true life, because a life without love and without truth would not be life. The Kingdom of God is precisely the presence of truth and love and thus is healing in the depths of our being. One therefore understands why his preaching and the cures he works always go together: in fact, they form one message of hope and salvation.

Thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' work is extended in the Church's mission. Through the sacraments it is Christ who communicates his life to multitudes of brothers and sisters, while he heals and comforts innumerable sick people through the many activities of health-care assistance that Christian communities promote with fraternal charity. Thus they reveal the true Face of God, his love. It is true: very many Christians around the world priests, religious and lay people - have lent and continue to lend their hands, eyes and hearts to Christ, true physician of

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bodies and souls! Let us pray for all sick people, especially those who are most seriously ill, who can in no way provide for themselves but depend entirely on the care of others. May each one of them experience, in the solicitude of those who are beside them, the power and love of God and the richness of his saving grace. Mary, health of the sick, pray for us!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What do you think it means that our "truest and deepest illness is the absence of God, who is the source of truth and love"? Have you seen this in the world or yourself?



Heart: Do you think God heals today – physically, emotionally, or spiritually – in supernatural ways? Have you or someone you know experienced healing? What happened?



Hands: If you feel comfortable sharing, what's one area of your life that you feel you need healing from God? (Consider praying with one another for healing)

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the 'Glory Be'.