

September 16, 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

On Wednesday, the Church celebrated the Exultation of the Cross and these words were proclaimed throughout Catholic churches:

“We adore you O Christ and we bless you because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.”

Does anyone need any healing? We all do! And God wants to heal us. Of course, it may not be the healing we are expecting, because our expectations are so limited in comparison to the overabundant generosity of God.

The weekend of September 24 and 25 we will pray for healing at all the masses as we did before Covid. Please come to mass and be prayed over for healing: mental or physical or relational, for ourselves and for our love ones. We are all connected. We always have been, So you can come forward for someone you know if you are not in need of any healing yourself.

As believers in Christ, we must challenge ourselves to think beyond the normal dualistic thinking of yes/no, black/white, up/down, right/wrong. We realize that even as we experience suffering, we are being sustained, healed and made whole. It has never been a choice between either suffering or peace. It's both/and, not either/or. It is the mystery of our faith, the paradox of life, that in suffering and death, life comes forth.

Therefore, as I preached a few weeks ago, our suffering (and death) can be trusted because Jesus suffered. He suffered relationally by being betrayed and misunderstood, physically by the scourging at the pillar, emotionally by agonizing in the garden. And yet he is sustained and endures all this suffering and still is able to love, forgive, grant mercy, speak kind words and care more about his mom being taken care of than his own death on the cross. Suffering did not have control or have tyranny over him. In the midst of his suffering, he found a peace this world cannot give. Made in the likeness and image of God, we have the same power within us, through God's grace, to know this peace in the midst of our suffering. How is this possible?

“Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” (John 20:27)

Jesus is telling us that touching the wounded/hurting parts is the way to deeper faith and belief. The suffering and wounds of Jesus are a prefiguration of our own suffering and wounds. The brokenness of Jesus on the cross prefigures our brokenness. In a mysterious and scandalous way, all our wounds are prefigured in the wounds Christ. Therefore, the greatest healing that can happen is not for our wounds to be healed, (Jesus is always depicted with his wounds even after the resurrection,) but that our wounds don't have tyranny or control over our lives. Instead, our wounds become pathways to the Divine and we learn to make them sacred, so we might deepen our faith and belief in Jesus the Christ, the Glorious Wounded One, who has risen from the dead and lives among us now.

How is this done? How is this possible? Only through the grace of God. To paraphrase spiritual teacher Jim Finley, only through His grace can we be so absolutely grounded in the absolute love of God that protects us from nothing even as it sustains us in all things. With this groundedness, we can face all things with courage and tenderness and touch the hurting/wounded places in others and in ourselves with love.

This God-given love is the strongest power in the universe and can transform the hurting, broken and wounded parts until Christ is all, in all. It is done by doing as Jesus told Thomas, we touch the hurting places, our wounds, the wounds of others, with love as Thomas did to Jesus. In loving those places/parts/wounds, we are transformed because Love transforms.

Begin to pray now that as we approach our Healing Service next weekend we all may have the courage to touch with love and tenderness our own wounds and hurting places and those of others, so our brokenness may become pathways to divine mercy. Let us hold one another in prayer as we prepare to experience the transformational healing power of God even as we are sustained in our suffering.

Peace, Fr. Leo

March 9, 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I pray that you will take advantage of this Lenten season to find opportunities to grow in your relationship with God. You may find some opportunities that are meaningful to you on the attached schedule of Lenten activities. The church gives us this time to reflect upon the changes that we need to make as we repent and renew our relationships, with God and others.

As we move into the second week of Lent, I recall that the last two responsorial psalms were about trusting in God's mercy. "Be merciful O Lord for we have sinned" and "Lord let your mercy be on us as we place our trust in you." This coming Sunday the psalm response is "If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Each of the psalms serve as a prelude to our Healing Mass the weekend of March 18 and 19. They reference our need and request for God's mercy, and God's universal call to us to respond with our hearts. Every Ash Wednesday we hear from the book of Joel:

Rend your hearts, not your garments (Joel 2:13)

Again our hearts, but why our hearts? Because the mind can only take us so far on the spiritual journey. It is too focused on protection, survival and being right. It cannot hold inconsistencies and paradoxes very well. It wants to understand, fix and control. Yet so much of suffering and pain cannot be understood, fixed or controlled. But with the human heart, when joined to the Sacred Heart of Christ, it can embrace and hold, and be with and befriend pain and suffering until it can be transformed into resurrection, new life and life sustaining possibilities. As Fr. Richard Rohr says in one of his meditations

As an example of holding the pain, picture Mary standing at the foot of the cross or, as in Michelangelo's Pietà cradling Jesus' body. One would expect her to take her role wailing or protesting, but she does not! Mary is in complete solidarity with the mystery of life and death. It's as if she is saying, "There's something deeper happening here. How can I absorb it just as Jesus is absorbing it, instead of returning it in kind?"... Jesus on the cross and Mary standing beneath the cross are classic images of transformative spirituality. They do not return the hostility, hatred, accusations, or malice directed at them. They hold the suffering until it becomes resurrection!

As we approach our Healing Mass, begin now the process of preparing your hearts to hold the tension of the healing that will happen and the healing that will not happen, and know that God is in both and sustains you. Pray to have the grace to see your brokenness as God sees your brokenness: precious and lovable. Pray to have the courage to befriend your sickness, pain, suffering and grief so it can companion you to the glory of the resurrection. Know that we are all on this journey of life and death together, so your pain is our pain and our pain is your pain. Finally, know that your suffering can be trusted because God has suffered, through Jesus his son. Let us pray for one another and our St. Andrew community.

Don't forget to set your clocks one hour ahead as we "spring forward" this weekend!

Peace,
Fr. Leo