

Homily: March 12, 2023

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

The ultimate goal of our Lenten journey, leading us to a closer relationship with our God of love and our neighbors; to become more and more like Jesus the Christ. We do this by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Today we also have the wonderful opportunity of uniting ourselves with Jesus by allowing him to heal us in whatever significant way we need healing. Jesus invites us through the word, through the Eucharist, and today, through the anointing of the sick and blessing with the relic of St. Odilia--to experience healing if we are struggling with some sort of illness—physical, mental, spiritual, and social. First of all, Jesus heals our relationships with him and with others wounded by our sins. He extends his powerful mercy as we call out:

The readings today are super for this “healing-mass” within Lent.

We heard how the Israelites grumbled to Moses in their thirst. They were at the point of asking, “Is the Lord in our midst or not?” Our present-day world is suffering the “sickness” of wars that do not want to end—in Ukraine and parts of Africa. We also experience the illnesses of division in our society and church. Our culture of violence is killing us. We do need healing and reconciliation.

St. Paul lived in messy times as well. He even added to the mess by persecuting the Christians. However, what an amazing grace, that only a few years later when Paul would say, “the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. . . . God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” St. Paul, the persecutor, experienced God’s reconciling and healing love BIG TIME! The Risen Lord called him to proclaim the Good News far and wide!

Our long Gospel today flowed over with healing and reconciling. To appreciate this, we must recall that Jews did not get along with Samaritans and used nothing in common with them. Jesus knew that the laws of his religion prevented him from engaging intimately with certain women, moreover, Samaritans.

Jesus, however, followed the law of love and asked a Samaritan woman for water, surprising her completely. Jesus engaged with her further about living water,

about her having several husbands. Eventually, she has the courage and faith to ask Jesus for the living water he offered. Thus began the healing and reconciling process—initially between the two of them. She felt respected in spite of her poor reputation. She experienced something so unusually great that she sensed Jesus was a prophet. Jesus then admitted to her that he was the Messiah, the Anointed.”

That’s when she left her water jug lying, ran to the village, and told the villagers, “You have got to meet this guy, who told me everything.” The Samaritan villagers immediately left their town to meet Jesus. They listened to him and invited him to stay with them. Jesus did stay with them two days—a phenomenal sign of mutual acceptance. End result—the villagers told the woman, “Now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”

St. John, who wrote this Gospel, would later write that when people believed that someone is a savior of the world, they really meant, “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.” The Samaritans felt touched by Jesus’ healing love.

They saw Jesus, a Jew, willing to talk to one of their women—a divorcee multiple times. They were awe struck by his willingness to stay with them—a major sign of mutual acceptance. They felt loved, respected, and accepted. They experienced deep healing and reconciliation on many levels. Salvation came to them from Jesus by his bold request for water, which broke through strong religious and societal restrictions.

Today we open ourselves to whatever healing we need, whether physical, spiritual, mental, or social. Jesus, who opened the healing and reconciliation process many years ago in Samaria, is the same Jesus who offers healing for us today—right here.

Along with the Samaritan villagers, we hopefully believe and can say, **“We know that Jesus is truly the savior of the world.”**