

Father O'Connor's Homily for 8 September 2024  
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time-B

Isaiah 35: 4-7a

James 2: 1-5

Mark 7: 31-37

Healing – Jesus worked a lot of miracles of healing in the Gospels. Healing of body, of soul, of mind and of spirit. Some of the miracles were spectacular, like the raising of Lazarus. Some were very subtle, without any fanfare like, “Your sins are forgiven.”

There were also miracles where Jesus showed a special sensitivity to the person being healed, as in today's Gospel. A man had been born deaf, and because he couldn't hear he couldn't speak plainly. The Gospel says that a crowd brought this man to Jesus for healing. But notice that Jesus didn't do it right there in front of them. He took the man off by himself so that he could understand what Jesus was doing, through the power of God, so that he could hear and speak plainly.

Healing – miracles of healing – we all long for them! But the truth is that the healing power of Jesus continues in our world. And very often we are His agents.

I will share three small stories of healing with you today. They are actually stories of Jesus working through other people. They are stories that I hope might help you see opportunities that the Lord gives you to be His healing hands in our world.

The first is about a man named John. He was married and, like a lot of men, John found it very difficult to show emotion. One night his wife became very ill and had to undergo emergency surgery. Afterwards she wasn't making the progress that the doctor expected. In spite of the medical procedures, she was not improving.

The doctor concluded that she just didn't want to get better. So he asked her, “Don't you want to get better for John?” And she answered, “John is strong. He doesn't need me.”

The doctor pulled John aside and told him what had happened. John went to his wife's bedside and said, “Honey, you've got to try to get better!” Without opening her eyes she asked, “Why?” And he responded, “Honey, because I need you!”

She opened her eyes and said, “This is the first time in our marriage that you have ever told me that you needed me.” Two weeks later she was back home recovering, with the assistance of her husband John.

The doctor reflected that even with all the medical procedures in place, the words of her husband – “Honey, I need you!” – were exactly what she needed to get better. And even though her husband hadn’t said, “Arise and walk!” like Jesus did in the Gospels, his words, through the power of God, had the same effect. It was a miracle of grace and healing.

The second story is about a baseball manager who had been a baseball player for many years. He was going into the stadium when he heard someone call his name. He turned and there was a middle-aged man whom, he assumed, wanted an autograph. But that wasn’t the case.

The man explained, “About twenty years ago my parents arranged for you to talk with me because I was all set to quit school and become a baseball player. You encouraged me to stick with school and that baseball may come later. I listened to what you said and took it to heart. Today I am an attorney, and I came back to thank you for your life-changing words of direction for me.”

That baseball manager said that he didn’t at all remember talking with that man so many years ago. But this incident made him realize how important those small things are in life. The words that we speak one-on-one, or over the telephone, or even in a note – there can be power in those words!

That baseball manager never physically touched that young man’s ears, but his words did. Jesus Christ, working through him, touched that young man and his future. It was a miracle of grace and healing.

The third story is about a former British rock star who had a conversion to Christianity. In the early 1970’s he did some missionary travel to Sudan and Bangladesh. He was overwhelmed by the poverty, the hunger and the illness. He would meet with people there. But after he shook their hands, he would immediately go and wash his.

He describes how the Lord got through his hardened heart. One day he was visiting a place where there were small children who were ill, very thin and covered with sores. He knelt down next to a sick child, and he later shamefully admitted that it was so that he could have a publicity photo taken. And, he was very careful not to touch that child.

Then someone accidentally stepped on that child’s fingers, and the child screamed and cried. The man instinctively reached down and picked

that child up. And the child stopped crying and became calm in his arms. It was a miracle of grace and healing, he said, for him to embrace that child. It was a miracle for that child as well. Jesus had said, "Let the little children come to Me." Now he was the agent of the Lord, welcoming and comforting that hurting little child.

Some of God's miracles in life are spectacular – but most don't appear that way. And so many of them, by God's grace, come through the opportunities that lie before us: in powerful words like "I need you," "I love you," "I'm here for you." And in powerful acts like being present to someone, or a pat on the back, or even a hug.

Please remember that oftentimes you and I are the answer that God sends to someone else's prayers. And so often others become God's answer to our prayers too.

Through His grace, the healing power of Jesus has been placed in our hands. Watch for that next opportunity and reach out and take hold of it.

I promise you, that moment will not be too far away.