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**From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.**

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# Health and Spiritual Wholeness through Life's Journey

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## **Health and Spiritual Wholeness through Life's Journey**

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## **Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Sunday Readings for July 1, 2012 for Cycle B:

Wis 1:3-15; 2:23-24; Ps 32; 2 Cor 8:7-15; Mk 5:21-43

### **HEALTH AND SPIRITUAL WHOLENESS THROUGH LIFE'S JOURNEY**

*Lawrence E. Frizzell*

As we grow older many of us develop an increasing interest in our health. How can we maintain a balanced attitude that avoids the extremes of hypochondria and a nonchalance that masks fear of what a physician might discover? The Gospel accounts of Jesus's ministry make two points: he linked physical health to the *shalom* (peace as wholeness) of the entire person; he taught that restoration to health should lead the person to renewed service of God and neighbor. One has the fullness of *shalom* when soul and body are healed of sin and its consequences, and when right order permeates all our relationships. Would that we could absorb these lessons from our youth! We know that sometimes an injury or illness can provide a context for considering the profound questions of life. Thus did a wounded soldier named Ignatius of Loyola find his true vocation. It is never too late to make a new beginning!

As the Jerusalem sage named Jesus ben Sira advised, the person in poor health should pray and seek the assistance of a physician (Sir 38:1-15). "The Lord created medicines from the earth, and a sensible person will not despise them... He gave skill to men that he might be glorified in his marvelous works" (38:4, 6). Indeed we appreciate the advances of science and the ways in which the medical professions develop the art of healing. The Church has always recognized that this work constitutes a vocation prolonging the ministry of Jesus, the great Physician.

People without an explicit faith often search frenetically for ways to avoid illness. Is this an indication that they are afraid of death? A Jewish philosopher in Alexandria grappled with these questions a generation or two before the birth of Christ; his work is attributed to Solomon, the sage-king of ancient Israel. Reflecting on the first chapter of Genesis, he reasoned that God created human beings for *life*. Death entered the world through the devil's envy and the ultimate experience of death, which is alienation from the living God, comes only to those enslaved to Satan (Wis of Solomon 1:13; 2:23-24).

The great Greek philosophers had achieved an insight into the immortality of the human soul. The author of the Wisdom of Solomon argued that immortality must be linked with a doctrine of judgment and retribution. Only those whose life was worthy would find immortality to be truly beneficial. The norm for guiding a person toward the fullness of life is imitation of God; for this thinker, divine righteousness is the key attribute that must be reproduced in human life, "for righteousness is immortal" (1:15). The Gospel knew the importance of instilling the right order into all relationships and Jesus challenged his disciples to a life of righteousness or integrity. However, the divine attribute of mercy or steadfast love is equal in importance. Imitating God in acts of mercy allows a person to function with humility in a world burdened by sin.

Mark records two miracles whereby Jesus delivered a mature woman from hemorrhage and a twelve-year old girl from death. Jairus, a leader in his synagogue, approached Jesus on behalf of his daughter who was seriously ill. His faith was evident and Jesus encouraged him to persevere even after people announced that the girl had died.

Along the way an afflicted woman expressed her faith by touching the garment of Jesus. He called for her to identify herself and then commended her for this act of faith. "Daughter, your faith has saved you. Go in peace and be cured of your affliction" (Mk 5:34).

A similar acknowledgement of Jesus' healing presence in the Church, especially in the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance, should sustain us as we face the challenges of sickness, injury and even death itself.