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This article was previously published in The Catholic Advocate.
DIVINE PHYSICIAN BRINGS HUMANITY BACK TO WHOLESNESS

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In ancient Israel, teachers emphasized the truth that life is a divine gift that demands a moral response. They tended to discuss reward and punishment within the framework of our earthly existence. It was commonplace to interpret illness or misfortune in terms of punishment for sin. But does it not seem that the wicked thrive and even crush the innocent in the process of gaining the good things of life? In Psalm 37 and elderly sage presented the common doctrine in an exhortation that his disciples avoid jealousy of the wicked. “For evil doers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall possess the land” (37:9).

The assurance that the Creator is also Judge constitutes an integral aspect of Jewish and Christian theology. The truth that sins will be punished by God bears repeating, along with the point that the practical atheism of the sinner leads to destruction. However, the tendency of people to judge that an afflicted person is suffering because of his or her own sins must be curbed. The Book of Job is an eloquent drama condemning those who assert simplistically that the one who suffers must be afflicted because of personal sins. Although Job offers hope for a dimension to life that transcends physical death, the author does not offer retribution in the resurrection as the solution to the dilemma of human suffering. That theological insight will become clear only in Jewish literature in the last centuries before Christ's coming.

This Sunday's selection from Job's first speech comes after his friends have pestered him to confess his sins. Indeed Job is suffering but he declares: "I have not transgressed the commands of the Holy One" (6:10).

Those who have spent months and years as invalids may at times identify with Job's lament. “I have been assigned months of misery, and troubled nights are my lot" (7:3). Depression may beset those afflicted with such burdens. “Remember that my life is like the wind; I shall not see happiness again" (7:7). Although wonderful advances have been made in the art of healing, those suffering still face the questions that challenged Job and his friends.

Mark records the evidence that healing was an integral part of Jesus' public ministry. This showed that the coming of God's Kingdom would bring humanity back to wholeness; both in relationships with God and neighbor and in the very person of each individual, a new experience of peace would be achieved through the work of Jesus. The fundamental aspect of this ministry was the forgiveness of sin, preparing the way for harmony with God and his creation. Disorientation of spirit and maladies of the body prevented many from exercising their human dignity in the service of God and neighbor. Jesus came into their lives as the divine physician; the remedy of various woes became...
the sign of God's presence in human life. Throughout the centuries the Church has borne witness to the Incarnate Word by continuing his healing mission. Ideally, those who are beneficiaries of God's mercy and human ingenuity should then live more maturely. The example of Simon's mother-in-law is significant; once she was healed by Jesus she reached out in hospitality and service.

The people of Capernaum may have desired to invite Jesus to set up a "clinic" in their midst. However, he insisted on going to other places to preach there also. By example he showed the necessity of prayer, both in public services and in quiet, prolonged communion with the Father. He also placed healing within the larger framework of his teaching. Helping others to escape from pain and affliction could not constitute the deepest reason for his work. Healing the entire person, body and soul, would become the first step in that individual's task of collaborating with God's work of peacemaking in the world, and for the gift of eternal happiness. All of Christ's followers have a part in the task described by St. Paul, continuing the proclamation of the Good News. “I have made myself all things to all people, to save at least some of them” (1 Corinthians 9:22).