DePaul University

From the Selected Works of John E Rybolt

December, 1975

Proclaiming healing.docx

John E Rybolt

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/john_rybolt/96/
PROCLAIMING HEALING TO THE PEOPLE

John E. Rybolt, C. M.

A very persuasive and very human theme is that of healing. Practically everyone understands being sick, and being healed from some physical illness. It has been a strong tradition in religious language to transform the concept of healing to a spiritual plane. We speak of being healed in the sacrament of penance or in the Eucharist. We might develop the concept further by looking at the healing event: the moment between two different states, one evil and the other good. Healing might be viewed, in other words, as a moment of grace in which God, acting freely and out of his covenant love for us, brings us back into the right relationship with him as Lord, as parent, or even as spouse. Preachers, therefore, will find it helpful to look at the material in the lectionary for the Sundays of Advent under this very human and at the same time profoundly spiritual aspect: healing.

First Sunday - God Is True Healer
First Reading: Is. 63:16-17, 19; 64:2-7

To begin with the First Sunday of Advent, when we look at the reading from Isaiah, it is evident that the moment of graced encounter, true healing, comes from God alone. This is seen from the prophet's perspective in the context of the coming of God. Without God we are on the other side of that moment; without God—disorganized, apart from him, living in sin or evil, or disordered. "We are sinful, all of us have become like unclean men. All our good deeds are like polluted rags." The prophet prays in this sixty-third chapter that men might be healed or might even be ready to be healed. "O Lord, You are our father; we are the clay and you the potter; we are all the Work of your hands."

Second Reading: 1 Cor. 1:3-9

Paul, in First Corinthians, opens his Epistle with a great hymn of Praise: "I continually thank my God for you, because of the favor he has bestowed on you in Christ Jesus." This is to be healed in encountering God. In addition, God has favored man "with every gift of speech and knowledge," and they are therefore ready for the second coming of Jesus: "as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Gospel: Mark 13:33-37

The Gospel selection from Mark 13 confronts us with a call to true Christian life—that is, waiting for Jesus in his second coming. Mark warns us also about being too smug in our security while we wait. We should, rather, let God be at work in ourselves, now, during the day. "He orders the man at the gate to watch with a sharp eye. Look around you! You do not know when the master of the house is coming." As we examine the passage from the perspective of healing, we might paraphrase Mark: Allow the healing effected in you to well up to the surface, to become effective.

Second Sunday - God's Healing Still Goes On
First Reading: Is. 40:1-5, 9-11

The Second Sunday, too, can very easily be viewed under the heading of healing. Second Isaiah,
as he begins his proclamation in chapter 40, announces that healing has already been accomplished, that a new order reigns: "Proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated." As a mark of this restoration, God now goes with his people and cares for the weak; he is among them: "Here comes with power the Lord God who rules by his strong arm; . . . like a shepherd he feeds his flock, in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care."

Second Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-14

Factually, we know that the promise of the presence of God, and especially of the people's response in faith, is not yet wholly realized. In addressing this, the author of Second Peter startles us with his candid language: "The Lord does not delay keeping his promise - though some consider it 'delay.' Rather he shows you generous patience, since he wants none to perish but all to come to repentance." In this Epistle, the author uses apocalyptic images, new and vivid. He tells us that after the great destruction there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and that the people in the situation will themselves be new.

The message for today really is the same in Second Isaiah as in Second Peter: The Christian people lives now in the in-between time. Now is the occasion to live a blameless life, to be without stain. The power to live this life is the result of God's great healing action in Jesus. "Since everything is to be destroyed in this way, what sort of men must you not be? How holy in your conduct and devotion, looking for the coming of the day of God and trying to hasten it!"

Gospel: Mark 1:1-8

At the beginning of Mark's Gospel, we see the figure of John the Baptizer, an agent of the healing of others, a man bridging the testaments. Here we have a somewhat new dimension for the Christian reader: to be priestly or prophetic, in the sense of bringing God's message and gift of healing to others. John set an example of service by purity of heart and purity of intention as he led his ancient nomadic life in the wilderness. His life was purified by grace, and so he became an agent of healing for others.

The lessons of this second Sunday remind the Church that we are healed, but that our response is not yet perfect. We live in expectation still, and our lives must be signs and means — sacraments — of healing for others.

Third Sunday — Christians, Agents of Healing
First Reading: Is. 61:1-2, 10-11

On the Third Sunday we hear again from Isaiah. He has encountered God, been touched by his Holy Spirit, been healed. As a result the prophet is able to proclaim, we would say, healing for others. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the broken hearted." As a result of being touched by the Spirit, the speaker has become transparent, in a sense, to those whom he serves. Others can see in him nearly God-like qualities: salvation and justice.

As Christian hearers we strive to plumb the original disclosures made to the prophet. We, too, have been touched by God's spirit and live his life. So, transformed, we become vehicles for God's work among men. "He has sent me ...."
Second Reading: 1 Thess. 5:16-24

Paul, in his First Letter to the Thessalonians, offers us an exhortation to be ready for the coming of Christ, a theme already announced on previous Sundays. He offers the Church his counsel of how to live in this in-between time. "Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks. . . . do not stifle the spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test everything; retain what is good. Avoid any semblance of evil." Paul announces, also, that since God has chosen to heal us, he will be active among us. "May you be preserved whole and entire."

Gospel: John 1:6-8, 19-28

In the opening of John's Gospel we hear again of the Baptizer. John the Evangelist is seeking to clarify the role of the Baptizer for his readers and hearers, and in doing so offers again a plan for Christian life. Christians, like John, are to minister God to others. "There was a man named John sent by God who came as a witness to testify to the light, so that through him all men might believe." Said in another way we are to be agents or facilitators of God's healing: through love, through compassion, through the results of prayer and reflection, even through John's sort of prophetic sternness. The Christian is prophetic as John was, but with a new model to follow, as Fr. Craghan explained above.

The third week, in summary, brings the Church again to see itself as an agent of change, in many ways. From our perspective in this article, we are agents of healing in a broken world.

Fourth Sunday- Jesus, the Mystery of Healing
First Reading: 2 Sam. 7:1-5, 8-11, 16

The Fourth Sunday of Advent has traditionally offered the Church a clearer view, an anticipation of presence of Jesus. The lessons for this Sunday speak to that same presence.

The famous oracle of Nathan in 2 Samuel 7 shows us God's response to David. The king had resolved to change his relationship to God after years of freebooting in the desert, after bloodshed and conquest. God's response is modeled after the covenant to Abraham, an offer of unconditional faithfulness. "Go, do whatever you have in mind for the Lord is with you." From our perspective, David has been healed and is now ready to be an agent of healing for others. God is with him, active through him, and is ever faithful to his pledge of being a partner in this healing.

Second Reading: Rom. 16:25-27

Paul concludes the great Epistle to the Romans with a hymn of praise to God for his great love of men, Jew and Gentile alike: "... the mystery hidden for many ages but now manifested through the writings of the prophets, and, at the command of the eternal God, made known to all the Gentiles that they may believe and obey." God's love, we would say, results in their healing. From another perspective, God's action results in a new covenant entered into with the entire world. God will always be with us. This is a result, Paul says, of God's great wisdom. "To him, the God who alone is wise, may glory be given through Jesus Christ unto endless ages. Amen."


The Gospel reading from Luke, finally, offers us a beautiful picture of the presence of God
to men. The result of the moment of encounter or healing between God and Mary is the ancient affirmation "The Lord is with you." It calls to mind the title of Jesus, Emmanuel, in Matthew and Isaiah 7:14. The Lord is present to Mary as the Mother of the Church and then to members of the Church, the members of the Mystical Body. This membership enables the Church to answer God with Mary's answer: "Fiat, Let it be done." To paraphrase this response from our perspective of healing: Since you have healed me and are now always with me in the Church, let me be your minister in the world, your agent of healing for others.

**A Time to be Healed**

In this review of the four Sundays of Advent, it is possible to see many models to which the theme of healing is applicable. The theme can, of course, be pursued in many parts of the Church year, but it appears particularly applicable at the beginning of the Church's year. Advent signals the possibility of a new state. At the juncture of old and new comes the moment of grace, the moment of healing. It comes due to God's grace, in the Holy Spirit offered freely to the Church. We are invited to share in the love of the Father by being ministers of his healing love, willing to forgive "seven times a day."