

Homily
February 12, 2023
6th Sunday in Ordinary Time
25:14 – 39:44

My! It is a glorious day out there today. Absolutely stunning. I'm glad we can gather and then go forth back into this beautiful sunny day.

This is the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, as we said at the beginning. It's also the World Day of Prayer for the Sick because Pope Francis declared that this was the perfect day for that. Throughout the world we remember the sick. For us it's a day to consider those who need to be healed. So it may seem that the readings we had were most apt.

That First Reading, that beautiful passage from Isaiah Chapter 66. It is a powerful statement about the goodness of God in the feminine. Jerusalem is declared as a mother who cares for her people. They have returned from exile and this Jerusalem, this female image, is to heal them, nurture them from that experience, so that they may live more fully.

In our Psalm today – it's very familiar. Even both the servers next to me knew it – "I don't need the book." ***All the ends of the earth have seen the power of God.*** And if we listen to the verses, the power of God there is not just mighty, it is of mercy and healing. Let all the world know of God's care.

And of course, James: this is where we get the root of our Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. *Are there people sick among you? Let them send for the presbyters, (that is "the priests.") And let the priests pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.* We did that last night here for probably 50 people who came forward for the anointing. It was a wonderful moment.

And then we get to this Gospel, which – here's an irony – how the heck does making wine out of water have anything to do with healing? Well, consider for a moment. Jesus is there with Mary, his mother and the disciples. And Mary asks him to intervene in a very awkward moment. They have no wine. You cannot have a Jewish wedding feast without wine. It's just impossible.

And of course, we encounter not only the awkward moment of no wine, but the awkward moment between mother and son, when she tells him, "They have no wine." And he says, "Woman, what does *your* concern have to do with *me*?" You know, most of us hear that and may go, "That smart-aleck child. He needs a good slap up the back of the head." But this is part of the encounter. He says it's not my time. But somehow in her maternal instinct she knew better. As mothers often do.

Then she turns to the servants and says to them, "Do whatever he asks of you." And he brings about an instant cure of this awkward moment. Yes, the water becomes wine. The connection here to our feast day becomes clear. We have witnessed in that Gospel intercession and healing. Albeit, we might not think of it as healing, but if you were the bridegroom and the bride, it was healing.

Healing, though, my brothers and sisters is seldom instantaneous. Even the gift of a miracle has to unfold. Typically healing is a process.

The sufferer decides to embrace the possibility of healing. They have some hope for success or cure. And they're willing to risk it because perhaps it began with an intervention: a doctor, a nurse, a technician, a counselor, family, friend, priest, deacon, even a stranger suggested, "pursue this process."

Let's just recall for a second the paralytic whose friends tore open the roof of somebody's house and lowered him down. They had hope. They intervened. They are part of the process.

Or consider the Good Samaritan on the road, who pours wine onto the wounds of the man in the ditch, and then takes him to the inn, provides for him, and probably returns to check on him. Truly this one interceded and made possible the beginning of the healing process -- which tells us that we need others to help in the process of the care.

Now we know that the process of healing really affects the whole person, body, mind, spirit – mental, emotional – because we're whole, we human beings. If the body hurts, the mind hurts and sometimes the spirit struggles to understand and to find meaning. Thus, the healing process permeates the whole. As one part is healed, all the parts receive some healing.

Recall the many times that Jesus offered forgiveness of sins before the physical or spiritual healing. Recall as well, the times when Jesus urged, "Now go and avoid this sin," to continue the gift of the healing and nurture the whole person in spirit and truth.

Intercession. Consider those who intervene once the exterior process has begun. The sufferer asks, comes to us and says, "Pray for me," or "Would you pray with me?" The intercessor accompanies the person as the healing is sought and it unfolds.

Our Lady of Lourdes, Mother of God, the Immaculate Conception. She is a profound intercessor before God and her son, Jesus, in healing. Let's recall the *Hail Mary*, especially the second part. The first part is a wonderful quote from the Gospel of Luke, the Annunciation and the Visitation, but the second part, "Holy Mary, Mother of God (that is, mother of Jesus), pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen." We tend to get stuck on that last part, "And at the hour of our death." Have you ever noticed that? That little three-letter word, "now," is just kind of gone. But notice, she is an intercessor now, in all things, at all times. And in being so, she continues to offer us through that prayer a conversion of life beyond the sickness of sin. Which as we know, often affects us in body, mind and spirit.

Bernadette Soubirous. She was asked by the Lady to do penance and pray for the conversion of sinners. She was asked to be an intercessor herself. Bernadette was also asked to carry a message from the Lady to have a chapel built at the place of the apparition, that others might come to be healed. And in the middle of the 19th Century, you build a chapel – they will come. And they did. And yet, still do.

In short, Bernadette was asked to be an intercessor with those in authority to bring the message and the wishes of the Lady. And she did. Afterwards, she went into seclusion, entered a religious order, and spent the balance of her short life – she died when she was 35 – doing penance and praying for the conversion of all sinners, even as she suffered horrible pain in the disease that took her.

The shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes is huge. How many have been to Lourdes in France? It is a profound experience. I wrote about it after the Pilgrimage in 2017. People from all over the world by the millions, come. Some are sick. Some are seeking cure. The vast majority, however, come to intercede for the healing of others, to ask that the needs of others be heard and some cure of what they need be given. Oh true, it is a place of miracles. In the 165 years of its existence, 7,500 people have said that they were cured there. Only 70, though, have been declared officially to have been given a miraculous cure. That is not to dismiss those 7,500, but rather to know that the 70 clearly show the power of healing in this place.

For those who were cured, it was probably instantaneous. But we know that the vast majority of those who go there encounter a spiritual or mental healing, perhaps allowing them to endure their suffering in a whole new way. Perhaps now offering it for sinners and their conversion.

Our Lady of Lourdes and Bernadette, the co-patrons of our parish. We celebrate today Our Lady. Next Saturday, Bernadette. In between these two days, during our Festival of Prayer, perhaps my brothers and sisters, we can lay ourselves open, seeking whatever healing we most need from the Lord. And then, accepting the Lord's wisdom in whatever healing we are given.

Perhaps in this week, it is ours to intercede for others. Perhaps it's to visit them, pray with them. Perhaps this week it is ours to take up in a special way the Rosary and pray it for those who are sick. And as I learned at Cursillo years ago, you might even pray the Hail Mary in just a little different way, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for so-and-so **now**," in their greatest need. It's a powerful way to focus the prayer of intercession.

Whatever we do, my brothers and sisters, let this week remind us of the power of prayer, the power of intercession, and the wonder of Our Lady of Lourdes and her servant (our servant), Bernadette.