

3rd Sunday of Advent (Gaudete), A – December 15, 2019 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham, Ala. – 5pm Vigil, 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 750 words

Our readings on this Gaudete Sunday – this day of joy amidst a penitential season, as we prepare for the Feast of Christmas – invite us to consider God’s gift of healing, whether physical or spiritual. I feel sure that all of us here have prayed in some way for this gift at one point or another. Perhaps some are asking the Lord for it right now. And then, for some, the prayer for healing can turn into something of a bitter trial, for the Lord seemingly often does not grant our petition the way we ask.

The prophet Isaiah, in the first reading, foretold dramatic healings that would take place in the kingdom of God: “the eyes of the blind [shall] be opened, the ears of the deaf...cleared;... the lame [will] leap like a stag, [and] the tongue of the mute will sing.” And Christ, in the gospel, referenced these very miracles in response to the John’s question, sent from his prison cell. Why, then, do we not see more physical healings around us? Why, perhaps, have some of our prayers for that not been granted?

The Catechism gives an answer. It says, “Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.’ But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ... took away the ‘sin of the world’, of which illness is only a consequence.”¹

Therefore, the Catechism concludes, “By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion.”² In this world, the miracles of healing foretold by the prophets and even announced by Christ happen not primarily in a physical, but a spiritual way. The physical wholeness that we always desire will not arrive fully until the resurrection at the last day; until then, however, our suffering is not without meaning or hope.

Thus St. James exhorted us in the second reading, “Be patient, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord.... Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand.... Take as an example of hardship and patience... the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.” We see how much the prophets suffered. We see how none of the saints was exempt from suffering, either. And Christ himself invites us always to take up our cross. Indeed, he was born into suffering; he came to suffer, so that “by his stripes we [may be] healed”.³

Well, then, we are left with a question: What do these prophecies mean for our life on earth? What kind of spiritual healing do they foretell? “The eyes of the blind will be opened”: those blinded by sin and error will receive the light of faith. “The ears of the deaf, cleared”: they will hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow him. “The lame shall leap like a stag”: God helps those who are struggling along the path to heaven. “The tongue of the mute shall sing”: they will praise him with true worship, pleasing to him.

Each one of us is spiritually blind, deaf, lame, or mute to one extent or another. Moreover, we are like the parched desert of which Isaiah also spoke, yearning for the dew of God’s grace. Our hands are feeble, our knees weak, and our hearts frightened – at least at times. To this, Isaiah responds, “Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you.” And Christ tells us, through John, that he is indeed the one. We must strive to follow him with firm hearts.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1505.

² *Ibid.*

³ Isaiah 53:5.

But is it wrong to ask for physical healing? Of course not. And the Lord does sometimes grant it – whenever it is conducive to his glory and our salvation. We should always ask for it, while carefully avoiding false expectations and the disillusionment that can result. Our God does come to save us, but his salvation is primary spiritual in this life. Then, at the end of this life, we shall, as Isaiah said, “enter Zion” – heaven – “singing, crowned with everlasting joy”; there we “will meet with joy and gladness; sorrow and mourning will flee”.