

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

In our Response to the psalm we praised God 'who heals the broken-hearted', and in the Gospel we watched Jesus 'curing many who were suffering in one way or another'.

There are as many ways of a heart being broken as there are people in this church. I am sure that each one of you is all too aware of how you suffered the heart-breaks that you carry with you. Some of these wounds may now be partly healed; some are still raw. Some continue to paralyse us in certain situations; others have brought us to a gentle compassion for others in their suffering. One thing we have in common is that our hearts cannot forget the wounds they have received. We cannot hurry the healing, and we must be very gentle with ourselves when our heart is aching. It is important also not to deceive ourselves into thinking that time automatically heals or that if we forget our hurts, or (worse still) repress them, they will go away. Hurts can heal, but love is the only healer. It is not always easy to allow ourselves to be loved when our heart is broken, but we must trust ourselves to those whom we know really love us and will stay with us while we heal. We must try to speak of our hurts in the listening and loving space that is offered us.

The First Reading from the Book of Job expresses some of the feelings we have when our hearts are torn by the difficulties and hurts of life. I'd like to read it again, for there is some consolation when we hear words that express our feelings. We don't feel quite so isolated and alone.

'Life on earth is nothing more than forced labour;
Time is spent in nothing better than hired drudgery.
Like a slave, sighing for the shade,
or the labourer with no thought but for his wages,
months of delusion I have assigned to me,
nothing for myself but nights of grief.
Lying in bed I wonder "When will it be day?"
Once up I think, "How slowly evening comes."
Restlessly I fret till twilight falls.
Swifter than a weaver's shuttle my days have passed,
and vanished, leaving no hope behind.
Do not forget that my life is but a breath,
my eyes will never again look upon joy' (Job 7:1-4, 6-7).

And now we come to the heart of our reflections. Sometimes we are fortunate to find a friend, a psychiatrist, a wise person, who is graced to be an instrument to us of God's healing love. Sometimes there seems to be no one. The Gospel assures us that there is never no one, for God is the one 'who heals the broken-hearted'. If we cannot find anyone to hold us, God will never abandon us. So, when our heart is hurting, we can always cry out to God, express our feelings, plead for forgiveness, for love, for meaning, for release – and God, our tender Mother, our gentle Father, will hear our cry.

We are not to expect some magical cure, for usually there is a lot that needs to be worked through, and it does take time. There are things that we are to learn from the hurt and we cannot learn them overnight. We have to adjust to another way of loving and this too we have

to learn. But it is important to remember that what we experience as a break-down can, with God's grace, be a break-through into a deeper way of being and a deeper way of relating.

It was from his heart pierced with a lance that Jesus poured forth the Spirit of his love over the world. It can be the same for us. So often it is the wounded healers who are able to help others in their time of need, and it is this that is asked of us if we are to follow Jesus. God's heart is just as broken as ours by the hurts we receive, but everything is graced, even, and perhaps, especially, our hurts. They are a call for us to learn to love with a broken heart. A seed pod has to burst open to release its seeds to the wind so that they will be carried away and germinate. Hurts can cut deep. They can wound us to the depths. They can also release love that we never thought we had.

Now there is a secret to all this and it is to be found in the Gospel. Notice what Jesus does at the end of a day busy with loving. His heart breaking with the burden of the physical and mental sickness that was all around him, he slipped away to be alone with his God. He knew where to go in his loneliness. He went to God, to the one he knew as 'Abba!' This happens again and again in the Gospels. Everyone knows what happened to Jesus on the last night of his life. His heart exploded inside him as all his hopes and dreams came crashing down and he felt betrayed and abandoned. He took three of his companions with him into the garden, but even they were unable to support him. We are told by Mark: 'Jesus said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him'(Mark 14:34-35).

Later, while on the cross, he cried out: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Yet we know that even in that awful place, he was still able to forgive, and to love and care. Why? Because he was still able to cry out to God in his distress and know-in-faith that he was being heard. This is the key to Jesus' love. God is the source of all love, and Jesus kept his heart open to God. For this reason he was able to grow in love through his suffering.

It is this that we must learn from him. If there is no one to listen to our hurts, Jesus will always listen. Could I offer some suggestions? Why not come here to the family home we call the Church? Jesus is present through his Spirit wherever we are, but he is present here in a special way, reminding us through the symbolism of the tabernacle and the burning light, that he has pitched his tent here in the heart of the community, and reminding us, through the symbolism of the consecrated bread, that he longs to come to us in the Eucharist to enter our hearts in an especially intimate way and to nurture us on our journey.

Why not set up a little prayer-corner in your lounge room? A small icon, a candle, an open Bible, a special chair which you sit in only to pray?

Whether or not either of these practices appeal, let us never forget that Christ is dwelling in our hearts. We can always go there to find him.

Prayer is the key. It is the key to letting in God's healing love for ourselves. And it is the key to letting our broken hearts reach out in love to others. That is why in this Mass when we reflect on God as our healer, we prayed at the very beginning of the Mass: 'Father, watch over your family and keep us safe in your care, for all our hope is in you'(Prayer). And the Mass today

concludes with the following prayer: 'God our Father, you give us a share in the one bread (the broken bread) and the one cup (the cup of blood poured out from the pierced heart of your Son). You have made us one in Christ. Help us to bring your healing and your joy to all the world'(Prayer after communion).

We are among the crowd on whom Jesus had compassion. Let us join him in the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving that is the Eucharist, and know that he will come to us in communion to heal us, and our families, those we love and our hurting world. How he chooses to heal is best left to his wisdom and to his timing. The only limit to his healing is the limit of our openness, of our faith.