

SUNDAY 2-A HOMILY (Homily 02)  
“A Spirituality of Forgiveness and Healing”  
(Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; Psalm 40; 1Cor 1:1-3; John 1:29-34)

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One of the most well known and popular hymns written by Carey Landry is the hymn entitled *Lay Your Hands*. The chorus in that hymn captures succinctly the two-fold mission of Jesus as redeemer and sanctifier. It goes like this:

*Lay your hands gently upon us.  
Let your touch render your peace!  
Let them bring your forgiveness and healing;  
Lay your hands, gently lay your hands.*

“Let them bring your forgiveness and healing.” Forgiveness and healing is what Jesus is all about, and what we are to experience as the way to the fullness of life.

There is a double pattern in the readings today that present a powerful spirituality of precisely forgiveness and healing.

First, Isaiah in the Old Testament reading speaks of a servant who will be honoured and strengthened by God to be a light to the nations. That servant will than glorify God; gather the nations, raise up the tribes and bring about salvation.

John the Baptist in the Gospel picks up that thought of Isaiah, builds on it and takes it to completion. He speaks of a Lamb of God who is greater than he is, filled with the Spirit, a Son of God. This Spirit-filled Son of God will take away the sins of the world and baptize with the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul in the second reading to the Corinthians fleshes out the implications of the mission of this mysterious servant in Isaiah, who is the Lamb of God and spirit-filled Son of God in John. Paul addresses his words to the Corinthians who believe in Jesus, and who are sanctified by Jesus, called to be saints.

The teaching is clear. Jesus, the servant of Isaiah and the Lamb of God of John the Baptist, came with a two-fold mission, to redeem and sanctify, or in the words of Carey Landry, to forgive us and heal us. In the end, we are called to be saints as were the Corinthians, through forgiveness and healing.

Our task is to respond to this call. First, we are to allow Jesus to redeem us, to

forgive us our sins and our wrong doing. We do that especially through a humble, sincere celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation. One of the greatest losses to the Church in our day is a sense of repentance, or sorrow for sin. It is as if we are somehow above this, that this belongs to a previous age of the Church.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Probably more than ever we need to see through the smoke screen of sophistication, self-sufficiency and even false pride that claims to be above the need to humbly repent, confess our sins, and receive the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

In many ways, we might be like the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day who questioned John the Baptist, did not believe him, saw themselves as the religious holy ones above the need to repent, and rejected the invitation of John to be baptized in the waters of repentance. They resisted that nudging of the Holy Spirit, and ended up complicit in the trial, mockery and crucifixion of Jesus. The end result of that hubris was the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

There is nothing so pleasing to a parent as a child who humbly admits to doing something wrong, seeks forgiveness, apologizes and goes on to try to repair the damage that was done. It must be the same with our loving Father, who delights more in the one repentant sinner who returns than in the ninety nine who do not think they need to repent. The lesson here is that we all need to repent, to confess and to be forgiven – there is no such reality as ninety nine righteous persons.

But forgiveness is only the first part of the chorus to that hymn, and to the two fold mission of Jesus. The servant of Yahweh in Isaiah, and the Lamb of God in John, came to fill us with the Spirit, to sanctify us, and heal us. Otherwise, we run the danger of relapse, of falling into wrong doing and sin in the same way, over and over again.

The secret of the spiritual life is healing. We are not just forgiven, but also filled with the Spirit, sanctified, and healed of those defects of character, that sinfulness that caused us to sin in the first place. Jesus does not want to just redeem us, but also wants to sanctify us. We need to dispose ourselves for that too, to seek it and to pray for it.

The key to healing is humble self-awareness of our painful emotions such as anger, and defects of character such as stubbornness that we can then admit to ourselves, share with another, and above all present to our Lord for him to take them away by filling us with his Spirit and healing us.

Those who should understand this biblical process of spiritual growth best, who have an advantage over others, are members of the 12 Step Program of Alcoholics Anonymous. That program is identical to the sacrament of reconciliation when placed side by side, and in fact, can bring back to the church a renewed sense of forgiveness and healing.

Steps 1-3 are all about awareness, belief and surrender. That would be called contrition in the sacrament. Step 4 (moral inventory) we would call examination of conscience. Step 5 (admitting to God, one's self and another human being the exact nature of our wrongs) we would call confession. Steps 6 & 7 (praying for the removal of our defects of character) we would call healing. This is the most neglected aspect of the sacrament as it is lived out in the Church today. Steps 8 & 9 (making amends) we would call penance, making up for the harm that we have done. Steps 10-12 are living with the program. We would call that reconciliation.

It is fascinating to see how the Spirit of the living God has been at work in the 12 Step Program, leading the most wretched of all people, the addicted, to experience forgiveness, healing and a new life of happy, free sobriety. How much more so should we, the members of the Church, be leading the way into the reign of God, a life of freedom from sin and full of peace and joyful service; we who are baptized, catechized and given a sacramental spirituality of forgiveness and healing as our way of life.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is itself an experience of forgiveness and healing, a powerful celebration of the redemption and sanctification brought about by the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

As we enter into this second Sunday of Ordinary time, let us resolve that it be anything but ordinary by living fully this gift of a sacramental spirituality of forgiveness and healing.