

We use the reading of the day and do not choose special readings that reflect healing. Therefore, I have to prepare a different homily for each Mass. Often, then, I am thinking about my homily during the Liturgy of the Word and not listening. Twice now I found my attention automatically drawn to the lector and the readings and my attention remaining there without effort till the reading was over. This happened because most of the people were present to the moment and listening to the readings. If they had not been, I would have continued thinking about the approaching homily. We have that influence over one another. This is another reason why it is most important that everyone, not just a few, pray.

When the Mass is over the congregation is invited to come row by row around the sanctuary. The priests and deacons then give each person an individual blessing. The prayer of the priest is that we be open to the gift we just celebrated and received, namely Jesus Christ and the effects of his death and resurrection. With the Eucharist we have everything we need to be forgiven and healed.

You might suggest we should pray for an increase in faith rather than be open. After all, Jesus did not say, "your openness has healed you". Unfortunately, I think what Jesus meant by faith is entirely different than what most of us mean. We usually think of faith in terms of belief. So we would say the woman was healed simply because she believed that Jesus would do it. However, faith is more than a belief. It is an attitude, a disposition, and a gift. If it were only a belief one could then say, I believe

Jesus has the power to heal me but he will not because I am not worthy. Faith being an attitude also, one does not look at oneself but only to Jesus and therefore one's worthiness does not enter the picture. If it were only a belief one could also expect how and when one could be healed. Faith, being a disposition, allows one to accept the will of God in the healing rather than one's own. If it were only belief, one could train one's mind to believe. Faith being a gift, one cannot do anything to acquire it, but only be open to receive it. So even though what we want is the faith the woman had, because the word faith is misunderstood, it is better to say that we pray to be open to the healing gift of the Eucharist.

While the priests and deacons are blessing the people, the whole congregation remains in prayer. We alternate between saying decades of the Rosary, litanies and singing songs. Twenty years ago I thought the best way to pray was Charismatic. Since then, I have learned that it does not matter how we pray. One style is as effective as another. Since most Catholics are more comfortable with the rosary and litanies, we use those rather than Charismatic prayer or other style which is excellent and just as effective but appeals to fewer people.

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Pamphlet 325

## What is a Mass for Healing?

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In order to understand a Mass for healing or any other Mass, for that matter, we need to understand of the dynamics of 'anamnesis'. Josef Jungmann, the renowned Jesuit scholar writes in his book *The Mass*, "The Whole Mass is before all else an anamnesis...The word implies that the mind turns to past action - Christ's redeeming work - to bring it down to the present moment and into the midst of the celebrating community." Dom Gregory Dix in *The Shape of the Liturgy* writes, "Anamnesis has the sense of 're-calling' or 're-presenting' before God an event in the past, so that it becomes here and now operative by its effects." Dix says that it was by reason of the anamnesis or re-calling that the writers in the early Church speak so directly and vividly of the Mass in the present bestowing on the communicants the effects of redemption - immortality, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, deliverance from the power of the devil, healing and so on. When the Church comes together and gives thanks by remembering the death and resurrection of Jesus (anamnesis), the effects of what it recalls (salvation) becomes present.

The constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Article 11, teaches that the effects of the Mass cannot be received by mere passive presence. "But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with

proper dispositions, that their minds be attuned to their voices, and that they cooperate with heavenly grace, lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must, therefore, realize that when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the laws governing valid and lawful celebration. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite and enriched by it."

I am sure we have all experienced less than the full effects of the Mass because of the poor disposition of the priest. A few years ago I was on vacation with a couple of friends. We attended morning Mass at the local parish. The priest gave a short but moving homily. He celebrated Mass in a very prayerful and meaningful way. We left the church feeling uplifted. The next day we returned with great expectations, but found a priest who seemed to be only going through the motions. We experienced none of the love, forgiveness, joy and peace of the day before.

Much more often, however, we are not fully enriched by the Sacrament because of the lack of participation by the faithful. I was the associate pastor at a parish where we had many baptisms. Some of them involved folks whom we traditionally call fallen-away Catholics. Their lack of attentiveness to the prayers and the spiritual dimension of the Sacrament led me to the conclusion that they came only to satisfy an unconscious need for a birth ritual or perhaps to placate the grandparents. No matter how much effort and prayer I added, ceremonies with these families were always

dry and sometimes I would leave wondering if anything happened. This was in contrast to the baptisms involving active parishioners, where the presence of God could sometimes be almost palpable.

Priests are required by Canon Law to pray both before and after Mass. "A priest is not to omit dutifully to prepare himself by prayer before the celebration of the Eucharist, nor afterwards to omit to make thanksgiving to God" (Canon 909.) I think sometimes we can tell when the priest has made the proper spiritual preparations before Mass. I attended a Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. Cardinal O'Connor was the celebrant. It was very obvious he had spent a good deal of time in prayer before the Mass. He was filled with life and when he led the prayers, I could feel the Holy Spirit. His homily was full of love and the presence of God.

This requirement for prayer before and after Mass does not include the laity or even the ministers of the Mass, however it is a practice that we have always been encouraged to do. Can you imagine what Sunday Mass in your parish would be like if everyone came a half-hour early to prepare for the Sacred Mysteries to be celebrated? What would happen if we prayed for the priest that he truly speak the Word of God and be a living sign of the presence of Jesus Christ? Would anyone find the Mass boring if we prayed that the effects of the Mass, our redemption and salvation, be present and effective in each person? That is what we do at Mass for a healing.

Before a Mass for healing begins, the congregation prays for about 30 minutes -

the rosary, and the litanies of the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is done not only to create an atmosphere of prayer but to seek the intercession of the mother of Our Lord. The late Anthony de Mello S.J. dedicated his first book, *Sadhana*, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, "I am convinced that it is her intercession that has obtained for me and for many of the people I have guided, graces in prayer that we should never have acquired otherwise. If you get her to pray with you, you will be very fortunate indeed."

At the beginning of the Mass, I explain that if we have come to receive a healing, then nothing will happen, because there is no one present with an extraordinary gift of healing; but if we have come to pray, then great things will happen, because when we pray the prayer of the Church, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Christ is always present, and when Christ is present, his love is present, and when his love is present, healings take place. It is Our Lord's deep compassionate and unconditional love that heals us.

Using the above mentioned Article 11, I explain that in order to enjoy this healing love, it is necessary that each one of us prays the Mass, not just the priest, and that our minds be attuned to our voices so we cooperate with heavenly grace. After having established the importance of everyone actively engaging in the rite, we proceed with the Mass. The only other difference from a regular parish Mass is that we substitute the blessing of the water and an aspersion for the penitential rite.