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# The Catholic Physician, Health and Holiness

Rev. Charles J. Corcoran, O.P.

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When health is lost, it can be restored only through healing. Healing is not the same as curing. You can be cured by one who is ill. You can be healed only by a source which is healthy. To be healed you must be part of the same body as the source of health, sharing the same life. You do not have to be one body with the one curing you.

When the body is ill or injured, the physician does not heal it. The healthy parts of the body heal the sick or injured parts. If there are not enough healthy parts in the body, the entire medical profession can be at one's bedside with every known cure, to no avail.

"Healing" and "curing" are related as "learning" and "teaching" are related. Cure, which is a form of the word "care," comes from outside. Healing, like learning, comes only from within. The teacher and the physician are outside helps, ministering to the interior activity. There is good reason why the physician may be called "doctor," a word which means "teacher." Outside help may assist, but it cannot substitute for vital internal activity, whether in learning or in healing.

"Health," "holiness," "wholeness" and "salvation" are different forms of the very same word. The reason for this is that they all work in the very same way: by restoring wholeness where it has been lost; by maintaining wholeness where it exists.

Jesus saves us by healing us, not by curing us; not by taking our place in living, suffering, dying and rising, but by uniting us to Himself in His one Mystical Body so that the health of holiness in Jesus heals the sickness of sin in us. We must do our own living, suffering and dying. But, due to the fact that Jesus unites us to Himself, all these have the same possibility in us as in Jesus.

Healing can come only from a healthy source; holiness can come only from a holy source. Those who have the cure or care of the body can do their work without being healthy. Those who have the cure or care of souls can do their work without being holy. But, if you are going to be part of the healing process, by giving your blood in a transfusion, for instance, then you must be healthy. The same holds true for holiness. The human race had lost its holiness and its hope of salvation until the Son of God came to join the family of man. Only to the degree that we share the holiness of Jesus can we be part of the process of spiritual healing. That is the meaning of the Communion of Saints.

The physician can be part of the healing, and not merely of the cure, of his patient, if he can unite himself to the patient in a way which emulates the influence of Jesus Christ. How is this possible?

Our life is ultimately determined not so much by what our mind is on as by what is on our mind even when our mind is not on it. This is true for good or for ill. The deepest troubles which drive a man to psychiatry involve things which are on the person's mind even when his mind is not on them. Treatment is often lengthy and complex because it is so difficult to find ways of helping a man to put his mind on the things which are on his mind.

It is not enough for our mind to be on God. God must be on our mind even when our mind is not on God, so that if God comes to take us when we are asleep or unconscious and our mind is not on anything, God will find that He is on our mind. In biblical language this is what it means to know God and not merely to know about Him.

There is a deep difference between knowing about someone and really knowing someone. You see this in your own life. There are many persons who know about you, who demonstrate it by talking about you. They may know a lot about you, and prove it by talking about you a lot. But how many of those who are so glib and articulate in talking about you, showing what they know about you, really know you? There is all the difference in the world; and the difference is love. It takes love of a person, affective cognition, to really know that person and not merely know about him. That is why Jesus said: "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven." You can say "Lord! Lord!" if you know about God. But it does not satisfy God.

You must not only give your mind, so that you come to know about God. You must also give your heart, so that you come to know God. It is just such a relationship of affective cognition which must be established between physician and patient, if the doctor is to be part of the inner healing as well as the external cure of those in his care.

There are channels of input from doctor to patient beyond tubes and needles and syringes. There are channels of invisible input and communication, where the patient is profoundly affected by what sort

of human person the physician is. This is the level of love.

Pope John Paul II constantly reverted to the theme of love during his visit to America, because there is a widespread failure of love in our society. Now, most failures at any stage in life are rooted in failures at a preparatory level. Most failures in love are rooted in failures of the stage immediately preparatory to love. What is it? It is hope. We list faith, hope and charity. Most failures in love are rooted in failures of hope.

Just what is hope? Gabriel Marcel, the Catholic French existentialist, wrote two volumes on hope. He said that the man who is practicing hope shows a quality or attribute which in French he called *disponibilite*. The English translator calls this "availability." We must make ourselves available to each other if love is to be possible.

But I think that this is not an adequate translation. Many individuals make themselves available to you, but only on their own selfish terms and to your disadvantage. The man you hire to commit a crime is available to you, but for a nefarious purpose. Such availability does not lead to love.

If we were to put it into simple language, we would say that love is good will; and hope, or trust, is putting yourself at the mercy of someone else's good will. Try to do that. It is not easy. It takes courage to allow yourself to be completely at the mercy of anyone else's good will.

Human beings are afraid to die. Why? At death you are completely at the mercy of God's good will. And so many human beings are afraid to be completely at the mercy even of God's good will. Human beings are afraid to grow old. Why? When you are old and feeble, you are at the mercy of the good will of the young and vigorous. And so many are haunted by fear to the point of panic at the prospect of growing old and having to be at the mercy of the good will of the young. The young refuse docility and obedience to parents and elders. Why? Because the young are afraid to be at the mercy of the good will of their elders. Wherever you look in the world, each race, each nationality, each sex, each individual is afraid to allow the other any advantage over it. Why? Because each is afraid to be at the mercy of the good will of the other. That, more than anything else, is preventing love in the world, causing us to become emotional recluses, shutting ourselves up in the security of our own hearts, trusting only our own good will and not that of others.

Here we have the most important part of our Christian witness, which so startled the pagan world that the Roman philosopher, Celsus, said to his fellow pagans: "Look at those Christians. See how they love one another. See how they put themselves completely at the mercy of each other's good will."

However, God does not ask you to believe in Him without giving you motives of credibility, repeated proofs of His believability. God

does not ask you to trust in Him without repeated demonstrations of His trustworthiness, showing good will in merciful superabundance to you whenever you place yourself at the mercy of His good will.

This is the second and equally essential part of our Christian witness. We must show good will and mercy to anyone who is at the mercy of our good will. This is what it means to love one another as Jesus has loved us.

There is no one so completely at the mercy of our good will as the unborn child in the womb, the aged and the bedridden, the handicapped and the distressed. And what do they find when they put themselves at the mercy of the medical profession, the legal profession, the legislatures, the courts, the moral theologians? Often it is the sentence of abortion or that mendacious euphemism, "mercy killing."

The Catholic physician must take the lead in restoring confidence in the believability and trustworthiness of his profession, laying the foundations at the level of hope for that love which alone can put the doctor on the mind and in the heart of his patient in such a way that he is part of the inner healing and not merely of the external cure or care of his patient.

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