

Sunday 23

Of all the words we use to describe Jesus, two seem to have greater weight. They are the words redeemer and savior. Both of them involve an image. The word redeemer comes from a Latin verb meaning to buy something back. We still use the word in that sense in English when we talk about “redeeming” something, meaning to recover an item by paying a fee. The second word savior comes from a Latin word meaning health, but in English the word directly derived from it is the verb save. Therefore, to call Jesus our redeemer and savior is to say that he has bought us back from something or someone and that he has saved us or made us safe. Bought us back from what or whom, saved from whom or what, we might ask? From evil or the evil one. Even though we, on the basis of the Book of Genesis, believe that everything that God created is good, nevertheless we also realize that there is something very wrong, if not with the natural world, then certainly with us. Each human life is a struggle to do good and avoid evil, and Jesus as our redeemer redeems us from the evil into which we are tempted to fall and sometimes do fall. Again, as savior, he saves us, he makes us safe from all that could harm us, from all that could make us sick or has made us sick.

But enough of definitions. They came to mind only because of today's gospel which presents us with Jesus as a wonder-worker, a man who can restore people to health, a man who can free the tongues of the dumb and open the ears of the deaf. He redeems and saves people from these evils, and such physical redemptions, such miracles, were also symbols of the spiritual redemption which he produced in the souls and spirits of those he healed physically.

Do we believe in miracles today? Recently a niece sent me pictures of an accident. In the first picture you could see the broken guard rail of a highway above a huge drain pipe peaking out from underneath the highway, and a truck was standing upright below the highway but on the other side of the drain pipe. The next picture showed that the truck was perched on the last few feet of ground above a cliff which fell off into a ravine thousands of feet below. The truck had cleared the rail, crossed over the pipe, and landed on ground just above the ravine. Its two occupants, a young man and woman, had walked away with scratches. I bet they believe in miracles.

When people who are young get sick, it seems almost natural to pray for a miracle, the miracle of health. But when we are old and sick, most of us feel that maybe it is time for us to go to God. As

one wonderful parishioner said to me before she died a few months ago at the age of ninety-five, “I think my shelf-life is up.” The miracle in these kinds of situations has to be an interior one. It has to be healing of our minds and hearts so that we can accept the possibility of our own dying and accept it in the faith that it is not just an end but a passage to a new and greater life. If we can accept our deaths in this way, our minds and souls are healed just as clearly as the ears of the man in today’s gospel were opened. Then we can hear God speaking to us, and speaking words of love and hope to us. Our interior ears will have been opened.

It is good for all of us, even those still young, to live each day with our ears of faith opened so that sickness and death will not take us by surprise, no matter when they come. When we live in this way, then our mouths will also be opened so that we can praise God each day in all that we say and do for all that He has done for us, for all that He does for each day, for all the miracles of our lives, most of which we do not even recognize.

At this time in the life of the Church the miracle of healing is needed all around. Victims of abuse by priests need healing. Priests who abused need healing. Bishops who allowed abusive priests to continue in ministry need healing. You, the laity,

wounded and shocked by the sins of the clergy, need healing. Pope Francis has often used the image of the church as a hospital where people who are sick can go in order to find healing and health. But I do not think he was imagining the situation in which we now find ourselves when he first used this image. The hospital itself, the church, is sick.

The first step in any healing process is the recognition of the wound itself. Even for those who suffered abuse that first step has often been a hard one to take. Many suffered for years in silence, unable to own their wounds, unable and unwilling to expose them. But now they have done so, and that is good. Their healing can begin.

Those who inflicted such abuses or allowed them to continue must also take that first step. They must admit their sins, accept the penalties for their sinful actions and seek the Lord's healing.

Even we who have not been directly involved in this abuse crisis are members of the same church as those who were. Their wounds affect us. Instead of adopting the position of the totally innocent who distance themselves from the sinful, let us be aware of our own sinfulness and seek the healing touch of our Lord, conscious

of the Lord's words that we are often able to see the speck in our sister's or brother's eye but do not see the beam in our own.