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Encounter Transforms Us

Outline:

1. Bible text – Account in all 3 Gospels: Mark 1, 40-45; Matthew 8, 1-4; Luke 5, 12-16
2. Exegesis – Jesus encounters the sick man
3. Technology in the service of the human being
4. Limits of today's medicine
5. Consequences for us – suffering without meaning?

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Mark 1, 40-45 to be read aloud.

All 3 gospels relate this event in considerable consensus.

The leper asks Jesus for healing, which is to say, he believes he is capable of it. He overcomes his fear that paralyzes, that removes the last room for dissent. He steps forth out of his social isolation and approaches Jesus. Jesus touches him, overcomes his outcast status and heals. He heals him without moralising, without establishing a connection between sin and sickness, without judging, without rendering him dependent. It is also telling that the sufferer makes no complaint against God (perhaps it is not recorded?). Usually such complaint comes from those who are full, who have never suffered. Have the sufferers learned to see? Is sickness not a part of the fallen Creation or indeed a consequence of an imperfect life?

Jesus also adheres to the existing rituals and laws of Moses, in that he sends the man to the priests. Today, one would say: show yourself to your doctor, show yourself at the public health authority.

Before reaching the priests, the man in question proclaims the event to everyone he meets. His joy is too great [to contain].

If we read the various accounts of healing, it becomes clear that Jesus follows no systematic scheme, rather he apparently treats each individual according to his or her needs. This requires meeting the person and touching him or her. The body is never detached from the effect on the soul and the spirit.

Jesus offers the afflicted an encounter, but the afflicted decides whether to accept this. Healing occurs [in those cases] where the afflicted is prepared to bare his bodily and emotional wounds to Jesus. Healing always means to orientate oneself afresh; the previous life-path will go no further. Therefore, Jesus also confronts the afflicted with his being and willing. Thus, healing means to shape one's life anew, to assume responsibility for one's life, to tell of one's transformation and healing.

The parable reminds me that, as a doctor, I should encounter the whole person. My hope and faith can help him to believe in himself, but my faith cannot compensate for his [lack of faith]. Unless he is prepared to trust Jesus, healing cannot happen. Healing is not the result of our actions, rather ultimately it is a gift.

Healing does not replace any therapy.

People often cannot properly appreciate bodily symptoms and emotional points of reference. Jesus surprises the afflicted man by his intervention, and, in what follows, his perception of himself and of God changes.

Jesus' healing through touching or laying on of hands means that God's healing spirit should flow into the one afflicted. Today we can prove that, through the laying on of hands, alpha waves of high amplitude are generated in the brain, signifying deep relaxation. We also know with regards to children that they are more likely spared later consequences through touch than through speech. An interesting insight – but we are here concerned with God's spirit.

Jesus' touch is a loving one, not a functional one. Jesus' touch requires unconditional devotion. Healing happens in contact.

Patients also often have a negative emanation, hence it is better to keep one's distance. Not so with Jesus! But his action is always in connection with the Father, and in this way he avoids letting others' problems overwhelm him (and us).

In the parable of the ten lepers, nine say: "Everything is fine, as long as we're healed!" One turns back. He is healed of the illness, self-rejection and humiliation. In contrast to the others, he is able to make a connection of gratitude between the transformation that has occurred and him who has effected it. And Jesus says: "Your faith has helped you."

What would our reply be?

It [our faith] can only express itself in compassion. Christ himself has shown us this path by his life. With the path to the Cross, Christ does not create any suffering, but rather, suffering is solidly borne and comforted.

Society is increasingly expected to curb sorrow, and as far as possible to abolish it. But the will to utterly abolish it is an illusion and would be equivalent to the condemnation of love and hence the annulment of the human being itself.

The pretentiousness of creating the perfect person, the perfect society, with structural formulae is the actual core of modern materialism and this has proved to be a fallacy.

In the scientific intelligence/mind, the issue of God emerged once again after the collapse of socialism. Science becoming aware of one of its limits recognised that the actual answers lie outside of that which it can constitute in itself.

Naturalists achieved real “wonders” in the last centuries, in that they liberated humankind of many 'hostages', but in this way they served [to ensure] that people trusted solely in medicine of the material world.

Even if illness can be understood as part of a fallen Creation or as a consequence of an imperfect life, it also requires us to pause in consideration, to reflect once more on one's dependence on God, to discover new ways of living. Even an illness can be transformed through God's action.

Doesn't the patient often become the object of medicine? But in this way came success! And in psychiatry and psychosomatics – doesn't the soul also become the object?

In medical textbooks, we find no mention of awe, respect, faith, benevolence, pity, or compassion. In spite of all medical-technocratic treatment, the doctor is still asked for advice as a human-being who recognises that behind every illness is a life destiny.

These days it is apparently increasingly recognised that all technical progress can also be questionable and destructive if it is not accompanied by a corresponding moral-ethical advance. There is no reform of the human being and humankind without moral regeneration. However, morals cannot survive without forgiveness, otherwise they become law. Nor can morals liberate a person from guilt; only Jesus Christ can do this. Morals and laws are necessary in a society, for example in order to recognise one's own misconducts, which may lead to punishment.

If we fail to recognise that we are treating the whole human being, that we must encounter the whole human being, and not simply offer school medicine, then the likelihood is that he will end up visiting a healer, an esoteric practitioner, or a substitute mother who will simply give him a hug...

To end with a quotation that made me feel very pensive:

“Neither the believer nor the non-believer is spared the doubt and dilemma of being human. Whoever seeks to escape the uncertainty of faith must encounter the uncertainty of unbelief, which for its own part can never ultimately say for sure whether perhaps faith is not after all the Truth.”

(Benedict XVI, Freiburg, 25.9.2011).