

THE GRACE OF HEALING TOUCH (Lk. 1, 26-38)

Last Saturday we were celebrating the Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady into heaven. Today, the octave of this Solemnity is also marked by another feast, the feast of Our Lady, Queen and Mother. What is the mystery commemorated by this particular feast and how is it related to our lives?

1. We are Children of the Queen of Heaven

Mary is Queen of heaven and earth. So what is it for us? Children are born either in rich families or in poor families. They are rich or poor in as much their parents are rich or poor. Now this feast tells us, first of all, that Mary is the Queen of heaven and earth. Secondly this feast tells us that this Queen of heaven and earth is our Mother and we are her children. Hence our dignity is as high as the dignity of Mary, Queen of heaven and earth. This is the good news in which we are all invited to rejoice today and to sing with Mary: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour". (Lk. 1, 46).

This reminds me of the beautiful prayer of St. Bernard to Our Lady. He was sure to get whatever he wanted from God through the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin. As Queen of heaven and earth, her prayers will never go unheard before God, and as our own heavenly Mother, Mary cannot be indifferent to our prayers to her. Since we have a powerful intercessor in Mary, our heavenly Mother we are sure to get everything we want. You are a group of nurses. I wish that you should pray every day to God through the powerful intercession of Our Lady for the special grace of a healing touch.

2. The need of a healing touch for every nurse

It was during the last few months when I was hospitalized, I realized the importance and need of a healing touch for all those who are engaged in the service of nursing. As some of you know, for about seven months I was continuously undergoing treatment including that of two major surgeries in five different hospitals. Sometimes it was really hard for me to bear the pain. There were moments in which I was finding it difficult even to pray. Sleepless nights, aversion to food and exposure to different kinds of radiations made me weaker and weaker. Besides prayer, what gave me courage, hope and assurance during those days pain and suffering was the healing touch of the doctors and so many nurses which I was experiencing in their loving presence, soothing words, gentle smile, encouraging assurances and in their genuine care and concern for me. Most of the nurses were good and committed to the responsibilities entrusted to them. Unfortunately I have come across at least a few nurses for whom nursing is nothing but a profession and a means of livelihood.

In fact during the last few months I was really admiring the doctors and nurses because you get innumerable opportunities to be a source of strength, courage, joy and peace to so many people. What you need above all is the grace of a healing touch. That is why I am asking you to pray every day for this precious grace. The powerful intercession of Our Lady is there to obtain this grace for you.

3. Healing touch is a gift of God

Some doctors and nurses are famous and a lot of people come to them for consultation and treatment because they believe that these doctors have the power of a healing touch. Wherefrom do you get this power of healing? Of course your studies, your training and your experiences will contribute to your popularity, your reputation and to the success in your profession. Now you are all catholic nurses and therefore you should have something more. You shall have a divine touch which is totally a gift of God.

I would like to draw your attention to an incident described in the Acts of the Apostles. The apostles were in Samaria preaching the Word of God, casting out demons and curing various kinds of deceases. Now there was a certain magician whose name was Simon in the crowd. He was very much fascinated by the healing touch of the apostles. He also wanted to possess this charism. He offered the apostles money saying "Give me also this power. But Peter said to him: Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money" (Acts. 8, 19-20). No amount of your money, your talents, your studies, your experience will enable you to become a person with a healing touch. It is purely a gift of God and God freely showers it on those whom he likes.

You should remember that for you Catholic nurses, nursing is not a mere profession, but a vocation, a call from God. If God calls a person for a particular mission, he also provides the graces needed for accomplishing that mission. Since you are called to be nurses, God knows that what you need above all is the grace a healing touch and surely He will give it to you if you ask for it. Moreover, the powerful intercession of our Blessed Mother, Queen of Heaven and Earth is also there. Therefore "ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you". (Mt. 7, 7).

4. The importance and value of healing touch

First of all, we should understand the need and value of this grace of healing touch. We read a touching incident in the life of Tolstoy. We know that economically he was a poor man. One day he was walking along a street in a pensive mood. A beggar came to him asking for some alms. Being a good hearted and generous man he really wanted to give something to this beggar. He first searched the pockets of his overcoat trying to find some coins for this poor man. But there was nothing in it. Then he searched all the pockets of his shirt and pants; he couldn't find a single coin. As he was searching the beggar was there in front of him with great expectation. Tolstoy did not know what to do. He just embraced the beggar and told him in a gentle voice: "My dear friend, I really want to give you something, but I am sorry that I don't have anything". The beggar was deeply touched by this gesture of Tolstoy and said: "Sir, I don't want anything else. This is more than enough. I don't have any experience of anyone embracing me and calling me a friend. In your presence I feel loved and my human dignity respected. That is enough. I will always cherish the joy of this meeting with you." This is what we mean by the grace and value of a healing touch. So many patients are coming to you everyday. More than medicine, more than any other service you could offer them, what they would appreciate more from you is a healing touch of a gentle word, a loving gesture and a sincere smile.

5. Powerful examples of healing touch

We do have several examples of great persons possessing this grace of healing touch. You are all familiar with the life of Florence Nightingale. When she came to the Scutari Hospital in Turkey some 150 years ago with a team of 39 nurses there were over 12000 wounded soldiers in that hospital. The whole situation there was quite miserable and frightening. Due to lack of personal, care, medicine, food many soldiers were dying every day. Added to this contagious diseases broke out and took away the lives of many of them. But she was not discouraged. She did not think of the burden of serving all these soldiers in such a miserable situation. She looked at the opportunities of bringing comfort and consolation to these soldiers. She was ready to undergo any amount of sacrifice for their sake. With a lighted lamp she visited them even during the late hours of the night so much so the soldiers called her "the lady with the lamp". As this lamp enlightened the surroundings, the light from her heart went straight into the hearts of these soldiers. They all were longing for her presence and it is said that the soldiers were kissing even her shadow that fell on them. In this lady of the lamp we have a powerful example of the grace of healing touch.

Mother Teresa used to narrate an inspiring incident. One day as she was walking along a street of Calcutta she saw a crowd. The street boys were throwing sands and stones. She went into the crowd

and saw a old man full of festering wounds in his body. He was in such a miserable situation that worms were eating his wounds and the stinking smell that came from these wounds was unbearable. The street boys and the crowd there were trying to drive away this old man from there. The wounded man was shouting, screaming and was uttering all sorts of abusive words. Even when Mother Teresa took him in a vehicle and brought him to her house he did not stop uttering abusive words. Disregarding his emotional outbursts Mother Teresa went on cleaning his wounds and applying ointments on them with a gentle smile on her face and soothing words on her lips. More than this external treatment, the grace of healings touch that was within the heart of Mother Teresa was passing to this wounded man like electrical shocks. Gradually the wounded person became silent and was staring at the face of Mother Teresa. Then he asked in a soft voice: "Never in my life I had such an experience. Why are you taking so much care for me?" Mother Teresa showed the crucifix to him and said: "This is my God, whom I love most and my life is meant to render loving service to him. Now I see the face of this my God in you and when I serve you with love it brings great joy and peace to me". The man was really touched by these words and told Mother Teresa: "Mother I also see your God in your face and experience His peace and joy". This is the miracle wrought by a person having the grace of healing touch.

6. Wounded Healer

The grace of healing touch is indeed a precious gift from God. God freely gives it to all those who sincerely desire this gift. But there is one condition. Those who want this gift should have the proper disposition to receive it. This proper disposition is our readiness to share the pains of others and to undergo sacrifices for the sake of others. Jesus came to heal the wounds of this world. Now in this process Jesus had to sacrifice even his life. Jesus is a wounded healer. So many people are flocking today in the pilgrimage centres dedicated to our Blessed Mother like Lourds and Velankanni. Many experience her healing touch. Now for this, as it is said in today's gospel she had to allow the sword to pass through her heart. Taking child Jesus in his hands Simeon told Mary: "A sword will pierce through your own soul" (Lk. 2, 35). She is also a wounded healer. Of course, people like Florence Nightingale and Mother Teresa had the charism of healing touch. But they had to pay heavily for this. The difference between people possessing this grace of healing touch and many of us is this; most of us are not prepared to share the pain of others, not prepared to sacrifice our time and energy for others, not prepared to renounce some of our comforts for the sake of bringing joy and peace in the lives of others.

The grace of healing touch is meant to bring peace and joy into the lives of others. Look at the nature and learn the lesson: Unless someone or something is ready to die for others something better, something higher will not emerge out of it. Jesus said very clearly; "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn. 12, 24). Look clearly at the nature. A kernel of corn is buried and it grows into a tall cornstalk. The ice cube dissolves and it cools the water. A match burns itself out and it lights a fire. Water gets itself dirty and we are cleansed by that. A battery goes dead giving us music, entertainment and light. By dying all these things rise to a higher life. Similarly the grace of healing touch is a gift of God which God will bestow only on those who are ready to sacrifice themselves in order to bring joy, peace, consolation and comfort into the lives of others. May God through the powerful intercession of our Blessed Mother grant you this wonderful charism of healing touch. This is my wish and prayers for you today.

God bless you all.