

The love of Jesus for those abused

Healing Mass, March 14, 2015 ~ San Francisco de Asis
Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted

“**Come**, let us **return to the Lord**, it is **He who has rent, but He will heal us**; He has struck us, but **He will bind our wounds.**” Hosea 6:1

In a letter written by Pope Francis, last month, to Bishops and Religious Superiors, the Holy Father said “*that everything possible must be done to rid the Church of the scourge of sexual abuse of minors and to open pathways of reconciliation and healing for those who were abused...* Then he added [*It is*] *the Church’s duty to express the compassion of Jesus towards those who have suffered abuse and towards their families.*” Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Pope Francis’ words express very well **why** we have **gathered** for **this** Mass for **Healing and** Reconciliation. We are **here** because the **love of** Jesus prompts us, moves us, **impels us**. We **want whoever** have **been** abused to **know** that **Jesus loves them**, that we **love them** too, and that **they are not alone**. Many of us, at various points in life, have experienced **healing** by **Christ** and the **recovery of hope**; and as He heals us, He sends us out to bring to **others His gift of reconciliation, healing and peace.**

In the sacred readings of **this Mass**, Jesus speaks to us about **the attitude** we must have for our **prayer** to be **heard**. He **tells a parable** about **two people** who went up to the temple to pray. **One** of these men was an important religious leader called a **Pharisee** and the **other** worked for the government in a profession not many appreciated; **he was a tax collector**. The two men differed from one another in **one** more important way: **attitude**. The **attitude** of the religious leader, a Pharisee, is **arrogant**. He **says**: “**O God, I thank you that I’m not like the rest of humanity...**” Then, he **tells** God How good he is, what **good** things he does, “**I fast twice a week. I pay tithes.**” Notice this man’s favorite words are “**I**” and “**me.**” He’s **full** of himself, no room for others. **The attitude** of the tax collector is the opposite. He **doesn’t even feel** worthy to **raise** his eyes to heaven, but he beats his breast and says: “**O God, have mercy on me, a sinner.**” This is how to begin every prayer.

CCC: “**Humility is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that we do not know how to pray as we ought are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer.**”

Prayer arises from “**a thirst**”, a **thirst of the heart**, a **thirst of the soul**.” As one Psalm says: “**Like a deer longing for running streams, so my soul thirsts for you, O God.**”

In prayer, we discover that **our God** also **thirsts for Us**. Two of the last words of Jesus on the cross: “**I thirst.**”

CCC: “**Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for Him.**”

When we **humbly acknowledge our thirst** for God, our **need** for God, our **desire** for His **forgiveness**, His **mercy**, His **healing**, God hears our prayer. “**A humble, contrite heart, the Lord will never spurn.**”

God’s love is especially near to the **broken- hearted!** We see this manifested on **the cross**. **Jesus’ own Heart is pierced so our hearts** can be healed. His heart is **pierced** so that His **mercy may wash over us like running streams of water**.

The **love** offered by **Christ surpasses all that we could ask for or even imagine**. **However**, it is **effective in us only** if we **open up our hearts** and **receive it in faith**. He will **not force us to be healed; He will not compel us to accept His gift of love**. **He will, however, never cease to love and to call, to shine forth and to invite**.

In addition, **Christ** gives us His **own Mother to be our Mother**, too. She **assists us to trust** in the **wondrous love of her Son**, to **let its saving action penetrate** into the **deepest recesses** of our **souls, healing our memories**, bringing the **light of truth** to the **darkness of doubt**, and **transforming sorrow into compassion**.

Even though the **Apostles fled in fear** when **Jesus** was arrested, led **away** and **crucified**, **Mary remained** near her Son. She could not “**do**” anything **to stop the horrible atrocity** but she **could accompany Him**. Her **presence was not purely passive**; her **presence was a loving solidarity of compassion**. **When “nothing can be done” medically, legally, or therapeutically**, there are **other deeper needs that can still be met through loving presence**. The **Mother of Jesus offered** these to her Son; even at **His greatest suffering**. **Mary’s presence at the foot of the Cross told her Son that He**

was known and understood, accepted and loved. To be sure, it remains **hard** to **keep faith** in God when we are **assailed by doubts** and when **our hearts are broken**. It is especially hard for those who have **been abused** by a **member** of the Church or by **parents** or another **family member**. **The sexual** abuse of **young people** and **other crimes** of abuse sow **doubts** and **insecurity** in **people's hearts**. Whenever such wrongs occur, it is **difficult to continue to trust God** – **difficult, but not impossible**, for **nothing is impossible with God**. The **Virgin Mary** can help us to trust again, for she **understands the pain** felt by **persons who** have been **abused**. **She knows** about **sleepless nights**. As **Mother of Jesus**, and as our **Mother** too, she helps **to trust again** in the words of **her Son**, “**Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.**” Healing of mind and heart may take time. But it can happen because the love of Christ.

With Mary, we also **pray for perpetrators** of **abuse**, that they will **repent** and **make amends** for their **sins** through the **grace** of Christ. **Only in Christ** is it **possible to find healing**. He comes to heal the despairing and the broken-hearted. He can **help us to rise and walk in the light of His love**.

Through the prophet Hosea, He says to us today: “Come...return to the Lord...He will heal...

He will bind our wounds.”