

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Medicine and Faith Twenty-second Week in Ordinary Time Wednesday,
September 2, 2015 8:15 AM Col 1:1-8; **Lk 4:38-44** (While we promote medicine and
healthcare, we also have to acknowledge our need for the healing power released in Christ.)

“He laid his hands on each of them and cured them.”

Today we have a story of Jesus proclaiming the kingdom of God in sign, in action, in deed, not simply in a word. And the idea again of **the kingdom of God is the presence of God working among people, establishing an order**—that’s the only word—an order of **justice and health and prosperity for all people.**

Now **in this story Jesus cures everyone of every illness.** And this is what we mean by a miracle because it’s a direct and extraordinary healing that takes place without a diagnosis. **We too can bring about healing, but not without a diagnosis.** If doctors have the wrong diagnosis, then they will give the wrong treatment and there will not be a healing. So on the human level, diagnosis is absolutely essential. **For Christ in these stories, no, there is no diagnosis at all.**

One of the comments that Luke makes is that many demons fled. Now in the ancient world every kind of mental illness, every kind of emotional disorder was considered demonic. That probably is not a valid diagnosis. In fact, we know it’s not because we can see that there are various forms of mental illness and/or disorders and/or diagnoses that are chemical imbalances: for example, in particular, things like anxiety, panic, bipolar, depression. These are chemical imbalances, and they can be to some degree remedied with the right medication. And yet **there are many other illnesses that do not seem to yield to any kind of treatment or medication.** And many people claim, that is, the afflicted claim that some alien force is attacking them. Is this really true? It may be or it may be that’s just an illusion or delusion that is caused by their illness. Nobody can tell, so far. People have

their beliefs, but they can't really tell or prove anything about this. The point that Luke makes is **regardless of the diagnosis, Jesus can heal. And there are many illnesses, both physical, mental, of whatever type, that really only are healed over a long period of intense prayer.**

A person would be very foolish if he or she were to ignore medical help, like Mary Baker Eddy, who was the founder of Christian Science that says, no, you shouldn't go to a doctor at all; don't use medicine; just rely on faith. Well, that's not what the Bible says; **that's not what Scripture says or our Church has ever practiced.** We have always promoted the idea of studying medicine, practicing medicine, making medicine available to everyone, healthcare. At the same time, **we have to acknowledge our limitations. The smartest and the best and the most capable medical treatment just doesn't work all the time.** The healing process itself is something that exceeds human control and human technology and the ability of human beings to diagnose, as well.

So while we promote medicine and healthcare, we also have to acknowledge our need for the healing power released in Christ. And we have to be confident that God is really for us. As St. Paul says: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" We have to be convinced of that because if we were to become diffident about God's love, if we were to become unsure of God's care for us, if we were to become doubtful of God's willingness to heal us and save us, that itself would undermine our whole well-being. And **in that way faith is absolutely essential to health and well-being.**