

Healing the human heart

I was flicking through the Saturday newspapers one morning. Article after article heralded gloom and doom – murders, rapes, wars, lawsuits, and a range of letters-to-the-editor which revealed more ignorance than insight. Afterwards, I had to spend half an hour in prayer just to recover my hope in humanity! Which leads me to the topic of this reflection. Our world cries out for healing, and our Catholic community is a gold mine of hope and healing in practical ways. Let's look at some of the evidence.

Our country is dotted with Catholic retreat centres offering oases for anyone who needs to 'come away and rest for a while'. Whether a total beginner in the spiritual life or a believer with years of experience, you are sure to find a style and spirituality to address any kind of hurt weighing on your soul and sapping you of life. So many of the world's evils stem from wounds festering in the human heart, and our faith community is something of a specialist in mending wounded hearts.

Over the past forty years, the healing power of prayer has been demonstrated in dramatic ways through the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. In quiet ways, too, the same healing Spirit can be found in any given week in Catholic parishes where parishioners come together to pray for the needs of the world.

The Catholic community is home to programs and counselling opportunities that deal with grief and loss. For example, The Beginning Experience is for adults who have lost a spouse through divorce or death. Seasons is a program for children who have lost a parent. Retrouvaille is a healing experience for spouses in troubled marriages. Centacare agencies do untold good in caring for people in pain. Of course, God works through the health professions too. We are blessed with Catholic health professionals who share not only their medical expertise but their faith.

The sacraments are a highpoint of the Church's healing hands. Repeatedly we hear of patients strengthened (and even citing real physical improvement) through the sacrament of anointing of the sick. In the sacrament of reconciliation we find grace to soothe the heart and dismantle the destructive cycle of anger, bitterness and revenge. At each eucharist we have the opportunity to be reconciled, release our burdens, be 'fed' by Christ and his people, offer a sign of peace, breathe in the life of the Spirit and experience real change. Further, the eucharist commissions us to translate our own spiritual nourishment into 'food and medicine' for the world, and we have countless Catholic social justice networks to remind us of that fact, and to present us with concrete ways for doing so.

The healing process is the subject of books. A visit

to a Catholic bookshop will reveal titles that marry sound psychology and Christian beliefs. Most especially we can plumb the great books of our tradition - the Scriptures, and their ongoing illumination in the writings of saints and scholars, and in the teachings of bishops and popes. There is a wealth of insight in our Christian ancestry to guide us on our way to wholeness in Christ.

Despite all our faults and failings, as a Catholic people we remain a source of healing for a hurting world. The question is: do we avail ourselves of these resources and offer them to others? An invitation to a healing retreat may not always be met with interest. On the other hand, it could change somebody's life forever. •



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