

## GOD OF TENDER LOVING CARE

As Cradle Catholics, there are many things we are used to and sometimes they trip off our tongues, but we lack personal experiences with them. One of such things is HEALING. Although I was brought up with the belief that our God is a Healer, I never had a personal experience of healing until 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015.

One of my aunts who lives in London and had been blessed with male children, wanted a female child, and prayed earnestly for that. When she became pregnant, she asked all of us to pray for her since she wanted a girl, and we did. When she went for her first scan, she was given the good news that the baby was a girl and that everything was normal. We were all filled with joy and thanked God for answering our prayers. My aunt honoured all her ante-natal and did everything she was asked to do. Three months to her delivery date, she went for her normal check-up and a second scan. After the scan, the nurse told her she needed a second opinion and called the gynaecologist who looked at the scan once more and asked my aunt to call her husband as he wanted to see them. When they met with the gynaecologist, he told them he was the bearer of bad news – That the Amniotic Fluid had become so low that the baby would not make it to term. The doctor told my aunt and her husband that if the baby was to be born, she would have a heart defect, lungs defect and brain damage. In fact, the doctor told them that if the baby was delivered, she would not last more than 3 hours with them before she died. Upon hearing the bad news, my aunt and her husband were deflected, and they were asked to think about the situation and to come back in two weeks' time. When they got home, my aunt went in front of the Blessed Sacrament and threw herself at the feet of Jesus, she then called all of us, informed us of the situation and asked us to storm the heavens we prayer. We prayed and prayed and prayed. When they got back to the hospital after two weeks, more tests were carried out and it was discovered the Amniotic Fluid was getting lower and lower; the expert advised my aunt and her husband to abort the baby or face a life of misery. My aunt and her husband had agreed that was not an option, that they will trust God, carry the baby to term and bear the consequences. We all prayed and prayed and prayed. When my aunt went into labour, we all had our phones on standby for the worst news ever; however, a part of us looked up to God for a miracle. We waited to hear from my aunt, but we heard nothing; later that evening, my aunt's husband called me with shouts of joy. He informed me that the baby was delivered safely, and she was sleeping soundly beside my aunt. ALLELULIA!!! He said the hospital was prepared for the worst scenario, but God had His way in the end. As I speak to you, that child that my aunt was asked to abort became my goddaughter and will be making her First Holy Communion this year. Yes, she had had few health challenges, but they are all under control. This is my firsthand experience of God's tender loving care which He manifested in healing my goddaughter as He did in today's Gospel reading.

In our Gospel pericope from Mark Chapter 1, we encounter that side of Jesus that is often neglected in the New Testament – His Tender Loving Care. From healing Simon's mother-in-law of her fever, curing the diseases of the sick people who were brought to Him, casting out many devils from those who were possessed, to spending intimate time in prayer with His Father. This tender loving side of Jesus is keenly expressed in the Greek word used for **cure** in our Gospel, which is *Therapeuo*. *Therapeuo* has two major meanings, and those meanings are applied to Christ concurrently; it means to heal, cure, and restore to health, and it equally means to serve and to do service. It is from *therapeuo* that we get therapist. Yes, Jesus was a man on mission, and that mission was that of service to all. In today's First Reading, Job echoed this sense of service when he said that our lives on earth are nothing more than pressed service. Although we cannot heal people like Jesus, we can heal them by serving them, being their close companions and confidante and being their therapists. This is exactly what St Paul was alluding to in today's Second Reading from 1Corinthians Chapter 9, he stated that he made himself all things to all men to save some at any cost.

My friends, there are two major things all Psychologists agree that we all need healing from – **Anxieties and Past Trauma**. Although our world is becoming more and more digitalised and advanced, all of us are equally anxious about so many things in life such as the precarious state of world peace, the needed boost in global economy, the advancement of AI and so on. In addition to these anxieties, there are traumas many of us are carrying with us, it might be unpleasant and abusive experiences in our childhood, teenage and/or adult years. Imagine how wonderful the world would be if all of us are everyday therapists to each other by being the shoulders others can lean on when they need it. While we seek out psychological healing for the above, it is equally important we do not forget the spiritual healing needed to smoothen those areas of our lives. One place we can regularly find this spiritual healing is in the Sacrament of Reconciliation; this is the sacrament where God embraces us and welcomes us back. As a priest, I do find this sacrament moving especially when I go to another priest to confess my sins; no matter the sins I might have committed, I always come out of the confessional with a light heart and a large grin on my face.

My goddaughter is a miracle girl, I always look forward to seeing her and playing with her; she is a constant reminder to me that God answers prayers and continues to heal in our modern world. Let us ask Him today, to turn His tender loving gaze upon us and heal us of all anxieties and traumas and give us the grace to be everyday therapists to others especially those in need of our help.

**Fr Johnpromise Umeozuru**

**Homily for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B (04/02/2024)**