



My Healing Odyssey

By Steve Citarella

Recently, I have attended a few Catholic healing masses where the homilies focus on God's love for us and His desire for us to be well, where people pray as a group for God's direct healing and where people are told that God does not want us to suffer. At the end of the mass people will pray with a priest and some individuals "rest in the spirit" after receiving the Holy Spirit and fall to the ground. If all this sounds a bit strange, consider the fact that at one point in my life I was only able to attend mass by believing that God was not actively involved in our lives.

On May 19, 1985 my dad died from injuries suffered in a car accident. I was 20 when it happened. The accident was the other driver's fault. My dad was a good man who did nothing wrong. I faced a spiritual crisis.

In many ways leading up to my dad's death I was innocent when it came to pain and suffering. I believed that God protected us as long as we lived a good life and bad things happened when we did stupid things and ignored God's guidance.

My understanding of God and how He worked did not make sense anymore. I was angry with God and could not understand how He could allow my dad to die as he did. The only way I eventually was able to go to mass was by believing that while God loved us He was powerless to intervene in our lives because to do so would get in the way of our free will. While this explained why God had not acted to stop my dad's death, it made God seem much more distant.

I did not realize it at the time but my dad's death would start me on a spiritual and emotional odyssey to understand how God could allow my dad to die like he did and why some people are healed and others seemingly are not. While I do not have the answers I am closer to God now than prior to my dad's passing because I am open to seeing God as a loving God who wants us to be happy, who is with us when things are tough and who can change lives.

My view of God has changed over the years. For a long time after my dad's passing and

later my mom's passing as well, I saw God as uncaring and distant, later I saw God as caring but unable to act, then I saw God as able to act when He desired and finally I am moving toward seeing God loving and acting whether I realize it or not.

St. Peter's has played a big part in all this. I came to St. Peter's about five years ago from a parish where I felt alone. I felt welcome at this parish and soon got involved in the parish and got to know people. I found that many good people suffered through no fault of their own and God did seem to intervene in some people's lives and not others. It seems I was not alone.

After developing some chronic health problems that can be pretty limiting at times a friend at St. Peter's suggested I see a priest and sister who knew about prayer and healing. When I met them we talked a bit about God and how he loved us all and we prayed together. Then they both prayed over me and asked God to heal me. Afterward the priest, who I had never met, said he had an image of two names that came to him in prayer. The names were that of my deceased parents. The priest did not know these were my parent's names, nor did he suggest what they meant. I was not physically healed but was impressed with the faith and caring of the priest and sister and I was, and still am, amazed that the priest knew my parent's names. The names came about as a result of prayer so God must have been doing something.

I also saw an aspect to prayer that I had not seen before. While attending Catholic school I had prayed to God individually in a church full of people and I had recited group prayers during mass or while saying the rosary. I never really talked with some people and then prayed with them. It was intimidating at first but felt good. This was a very new experience for me.

A friend at St. Peter's then recommended a book written by Dennis and Father Matthew Linn who help people see God's love so they can heal. They have written a number of books, including "To Heal as Jesus Healed" and offer retreats. They do not claim to be "healers" who have been given some special gift of healing by God. Rather they help people heal by seeing the loving and healing ways of God even in times of grief or suffering when some people, including myself, have trouble seeing God. They tell some amazing

stories of healing. Even if there are no miraculous cures people "heal" because they get past their pain and see God's love. Being open to God's love and healing can help us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

They also talk about the power of prayer. They mention how even those who do not believe in prayers or know they are the recipient of others prayers can be healed. They talk about how prayer, while fine alone, works even better while done with others and that people should not be afraid to pray with others and ask God for healing.

The Linns also talk of how the sacraments such as communion, penance or the anointing of the sick to help us heal. What is different about the Linns is their focus on the how God does not want us to suffer or hurt and that often times our own pain gets in the way of seeing God's healing.

This idea was new to me. At some point in my life I had developed the mistaken belief that I was supposed to offer up my pain to God and that God welcomed the pain. While we can offer our pain to God for others, the Linns believe that God does not want us to suffer.

The Linns are not alone. There are many Catholic authors who have written about aspects of healing. Some charismatic Catholics like Francis McNutt talk of miraculous physical healing that can occur through prayer. Others take a more traditional view like Fr Daniel Lanahan author of "When God Says No: The Mystery of Suffering and the Dynamics of Prayer." In the book, he talks about how even he as a priest had trouble understanding how God did not physically heal his brother's cancer only to see that through prayer God healed his brother spiritually allowing him to face his illness and impending death with grace.

About a year ago I decided to take a further step and attend a healing mass offered by Father John Campoli. I had heard about him through another friend and I was told after the mass he prayed over people, some of whom would "rest in the spirit" and fall to the ground after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. A friend offered to go with me since she had been part a Catholic charismatic youth group at her parish when she was a teen, had know Father Campoli for years and been to many of his masses.

Despite my friend's offer to go with me I was a bit nervous the first time. The thought of having a "healing" priest pray over me seemed strange. The thought of people "resting in the spirit" seemed weird.

To be on the safe side I did some checking and found out that a Healing Mass celebrated by Father Campoli is like any other Catholic mass with the exception that it has a greater emphasis the mystery of suffering and God's healing power with a focus on spiritual healing. At the end of the mass people are invited to be prayed over by Father Campoli who asks God to touch people with "His healing in mind, body and spirit." This seemed safe. Thanks to all I had read and experienced in the past years I decided to give it a try.

The first mass that I attended was just like any other with the exception that Father Campoli's homily focused on God's love and healing. He told stories about the healing nature of God. He spoke of the healing done by Jesus. He spoke of God's love and Jesus's love. He spoke of people at the mass coming together in God's name and praying for healing.

After the mass ended people were invited to line up in front of the altar. As I waited my turn, Father Campoli seemed to be praying with each person and lightly touching their foreheads. Some people just walked away, but some actually slowly fell to the ground, helped by ministry members behind them, and lay there for a few minutes. Those "at rest in the spirit" eventually got up walked away.

When it was my turn, Father Campoli prayed with me and put his hand on my forehead. I did not "rest in the spirit" but walked away feeling loved by God in a way that I had not felt before. There is something special about people coming together, many of who are ill, to pray together, talk about God's love and ask for God's healing. Father Campoli's homily about God's love and His desire for us not to suffer really impressed me and made me question some of my perceptions of God.

While I have never "rested in the spirit" while attending a mass by Father Campoli, one time when he was praying with me and he lightly touched my forehead I felt like he was trying to push me over with both hands and all his strength. I had to work hard to steady myself and not fall over and it

felt like some kind of energy was coming from Father Campoli. I was not "resting in the spirit" but something happened.

There are explanations for what I felt. Perhaps I was tired or just dizzy. Maybe I was dehydrated and needed some water. It could have been some medicine I was on. Maybe I was caught up in the whole experience. For me though I believe that God was reaching out to me.

I have never had anything happen like that again though I do feel a special happiness while attending Father Campoli's masses. The masses have not caused me to understand why my dad died like he did. The masses have not cured my health problems. Rather they have offered a view of God's love, of Christ's love, that I had long failed to see.

Interestingly people helping out with the healing ministry have health problems and people attending a number of the masses continue to have health problems including me. I have heard stories of people being healed. I think much of the healing occurs as a result of people being able to see God's love despite their physical and emotional ills and being open to His healing.

I still don't understand why God seemingly allows good people to suffer and die before their time while He seemingly heals others. Yet, being around those who suffer and not only speak of God's love but are willing to share that love with others is an amazing testament to God's love.

A prayer on Father Campoli's web site says in part: "If it is God's will for me, grant the physical and emotional healings I seek. But, most of all, grant me a loving heart and the resolve to accept the answers you give to my prayer, knowing that you are always faithful to the promise . . . That in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

My odyssey is far from complete. It is easy to attribute the many blessings in my life and others lives to God but I wonder if I will ever understand why bad things happen to good people and why people suffer. At least now I am open to God actively being a part of my life and others lives despite the bad things. I do believe that God is troubled when we hurt and that He offers us healing in some form during tough times. It is up to each of us to be aware of that healing and take advantage of it.

Now I see a loving God who does not want us to suffer but wants us to be well

to use the gifts He has given us. I feel more comfortable asking God to heal others and me. I am more comfortable praying with others. I am more open to being aware of God during tough times.

I am also open to the aspects of Catholicism that seemed strange to me at one point, whether group prayer or healing masses. My desire to understand my dad's and later my mom's passing has led me to the special community that is St. Peter's, to aspects of Catholicism that I would never have found and to an understanding of God I would never have imagined. Who knows I may one day go to a mass offered by Father Campoli or some other priest and "rest in the spirit" as well.

THE BLESSING OF BEER

By Janet George

In the Middle Ages, beer (which was made from cereal grains) was one of the safest, most nutritious everyday drinks for northern Europeans - since grapes didn't grow in the colder climate and the water was often polluted.

Occasionally a batch would go bad and people would naturally blame the devil for the problem. To keep the demon away, brewers would place religious statues in their brew house and also ask the local priest to bless a new batch. Bock beer is a darker, stronger beer which began in Northern Germany. It is brewed in the fall, aged through the winter, and served in early spring. Beer festivals traditionally began on St. Joseph's Day (March 19) and often included the blessing of the new beer.

Many monasteries brewed their own beer. It was a staple of the monks diet because of the nutritious qualities (they called it "liquid bread"). This was true especially during Lenten fast which restricted solid food.

Since monasteries often served as inns for travelers, monks sold their beer as a means of support. Some beers still bear the name of the monastery.

ONE WAY TO HELP A BAD BACK

By Pat Rice

If you're old enough, you've probably been bothered with a bad back at one time or another. It's annoying, immobilizing, and a whole lot of other negative things. A major cause for missing time at work is a bad back.

Missing time or being unable to do things or go places is a big inconvenience. It can prevent you from doing things you were meant to do, which is really what God wanted you to do. You could be out doing positive things, but you're laid up at home.

When your back bothers you, one way to loosen up and improve matters is to stretch your lower back and that's a good start. It's good to stretch, even when you're healthy.

However, the one area that gets neglected in all of this is the hamstring muscles.

The hamstrings are long muscles in the back of your thigh that connects from the knee to the hip. They're one of the longest muscles in the body and help bend the knee and extend the hip. When hamstring muscles are tight, they can pull the hips and pelvis out of its normal position. That affects the lower back, making you uncomfortable.

In addition to stretching the lower back, it's wise to stretch the hamstrings. Stretching lengthens those muscles, loosening the tension on the hips and pelvis. When there's no tension in those areas, things are usually normal.

Unfortunately, it's easy to tighten those muscles up. Many of us have tight hamstrings at one time or another. Long periods of sitting are a major way to tighten the hamstring muscles. How many of you spend a great deal of your day sitting in an office or car? If you're not stretching, those muscles tighten up and your back can feel it.

There are several ways to tighten the hamstrings. I'm not going to diagram all of them, but I can give you one that works for me:

Sit on a floor or mat, with the back of your legs touching the floor or mat. Lean back a little bit, extend your arms, and place your palms on the floor (you can also do this laying down). Lift your right leg and place the heel on the big toe of your left leg. Move your right foot towards you and hold for 15 seconds. Stretch gently and you should feel a stretch in the right hamstring. As you do it more often, you can hold the stretch for up to 30 seconds. Do it about several times, and then switch to the other leg and repeat.

The main point in this is to stretch gently and don't overdo it. Do not bounce because you're pulling the muscle too hard and hurt it.

This is not the ultimate cure to a bad back, but it can improve your odds of getting better. If your back is fine, you should still do it as a preventive measure. I'm not an expert, but I know enough. This helped me when my back was bothering me during the Christmas Holidays last year and the early part of the New Year.

There are several web sites that can show you good stretches

by doing an internet search. There are numerous ways to upset your back, including bad posture while you sit. Another way to improve your back is to strengthen your midsection, which has become known as the core muscles in recent years. The key is to help your ailing back or prevent it from happening. You'll be able to do what you're meant to do more often. By stretching the hamstrings, you'll increase the odds of your back not acting up.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE THE LIBRARY IS LOCATED?

The parish library is just beyond the gathering space, on the left (east) side, opposite the entrance to the church itself.

The Library is open after the 8 a.m., 9:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. Masses on Sunday. It is also open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. There will be library volunteers to help you on Sunday. From Monday through Thursday, you will be able to withdraw a book by following directions that you will find written out on the round table.

The Parish Library is a gift to you!

Please take advantage of it.

NEW BOOKS IN THE PARISH LIBRARY

By Eleanor Grybowski

GREEN TAPE

PAUL, LEAST OF THE APOSTLES BY ALAIN DECAUX

(translated from French) This is an easy-to-read book about the Apostle, Paul. The author combines the past with the present by sharing memories of visits he made to places where Paul lived and traveled. Beautiful photos and artwork images.

YELLOW TAPE

THE LAST LECTURE BY RANDY PAUSCH

The author was a professor at Carnegie Mellon when he was diagnosed with a terminal illness. His last lecture was about achieving your childhood dreams - not about dying. This is an inspirational book with a lot of humor in it.

YELLOW TAPE

BIG RUSS AND ME - *Lessons of Life* BY TIM RUSSERT

The author brings us into his 1950's Irish Catholic community in Buffalo, and beyond. He introduces us to the people who influenced his life, especially his father, "Big Russ".

YELLOW TAPE

WISDOM OF OUR FATHERS - *Letters and Lessons from*

Daughters and Sons BY TIM RUSSERT

This was the author's second book. He received so many letters from people about their fathers that he decided to write a second book and include many of these letters.

YELLOW TAPE

THE WINNERS MANUAL BY JIM TRESSEL

Coach Tressel of Ohio State shares with us the fundamentals essential for winners. As a coach, his goal is to develop a whole person, not just a great football player.

The MoMs Group by Rosemarie Short

I'm not sure how I first heard about the St. Peter's MoMS Group (Ministry of Mothers Sharing) – perhaps at the baptismal preparation session we attended before our son was born, or from the weekly bulletin or in the Town News. Since Thomas was our only child, I know I was nervous about exposing him to a group when he was very young, but I also thought it would be really important for him to be around and learn to play with other kids. It probably wasn't until he was about a year old that I finally brought him to the playgroup in the rectory.

I would like to say that from our first time going I felt at home, but I am by nature very shy and although several of the people there that day came up and spoke to me, I did not really feel comfortable there. It was clear to me that most of the people there had been going for a while, seemed to know each other well and either had a child who was older than Thomas or had more than one child. Thomas was also very young and basically clung to me – how much was he really going to get out of this? But I am also by nature very stubborn and although I was not instantly comfortable, I knew this could be an important place for Thomas to learn and grow -- so we kept coming back.

I don't remember how many times we went before I was really at ease, but over time other new moms came with their kids who were around the same age as Thomas, so I had other people I could really relate to. The other moms were able to give the been-there-done-that advice and stories, which was very helpful and appreciated, but we were all first time Moms and our kids were all going through the same stages at basically the same time and it was great to share our frustrations and joys and laugh together. As our kids grew older they started to play together at and outside of the playgroup.

We've now been part of the group for over 2 years and Thomas has just started preschool. How important has being part of this group been for me and for him? Those other new moms are two of my best friends and I now have many other friends in the other moms too. The MoMS Group also hosts a Moms-only cookie swap before Christmas and a wine-and-cheese after the New Year where we can let go and relax. I feel part of this community now. The kids have learned to be part of a group and they love the fall hayride and pumpkin picking excursion and the Halloween, Christmas and Easter parties the group holds. Our kids are now in the same preschool class together, which should help to make a smooth transition from always being with me to gaining some separation. Thomas has certainly grown from an ultra-shy kid to someone who wants to go out and play with his friends.

I wanted to write this story because I think there are a lot of moms out there like me who may not feel an instant connection with whoever may be at the MoMS Group on the day they decide to come to the group. Come and keep coming back! There are a lot of great people in this group and if the person you will really connect with is not at the first playgroup you attend, then sometime thereafter she/they will walk through the door and you and you child (children) will have made friends for life.

The Multiplication of Miracles

By Roy Pressimone

For some 13 years, going on 14, we've had this little thing called Cornerstone going on at St. Peter's. It's been a pretty amazing experience for a whole lot of people, and maybe the most amazing thing is how that 27-hour window has had the ability and the power to change so many individual lives, and collectively, our parish. All for the better. As one of our visiting priests from Don Bosco so aptly described our faith a few years ago, the multiplication of miracles...

No, we don't need to pat ourselves on the back. We haven't really done that much...we're recipients, not donors. Any time that we can come to a moment of clarity in the spiritual sense, one would think, is a moment worth preserving. And how does one preserve such a moment? One way is the Small Christian Community, a regular gathering of people whose purpose is to meet in the name of Jesus, read and contemplate Scripture, and discover the oftentimes unseen ways in which our lives have been graced. Many, but certainly

If you've been looking for a way to deepen your faith, or connect further with others of faith, consider this your invitation.

not all, Small Christian Communities are born of the Cornerstone weekend, bonded and propelled by the powerful experience of those 27 hours. Others are formed during Advent and Lent, and continue on. Other parish ministries become one, sometimes not even aware of it, busy as they are with the tasks at hand.

So often in this world we live in, losing our way is so easy. Indeed, life is many times overwhelming. A Small Christian Community offers the chance for that spiritual clarity. We don't always take God up on that offer – but it's always there, ready for us when we're ready for it. And with a little effort and a little practice, we can perhaps begin to see things in a new light. Like everything else, does it come easy? Not usually. But also like everything else, very little that is worthwhile can be easily attained. There is a place for all of us at the table. All we really need to do is accept the invitation.

There is an event called *Celebrate Cornerstone* on **Friday November 14 at 7:30 PM in the Parish Center**. You'll hear from your neighbors about how their lives were affected by the experience; you'll hear about the Cornerstone journey from the founders, Monsignor Slipe and Mary Bertani, and what it's meant to them. You'll also find out how you can become become part of a Small Christian Community. If you've been looking for a way to deepen your faith, or connect further with others of faith, consider this your invitation.

THE NET WORKER

The Newsletter of St. Peter the Apostle Parish River Edge, New Jersey

EDITOR - Pam Lobley DESIGN & LAYOUT - Ana DiBisceglie

CONTACT US: 445 Fifth Avenue, River Edge, NJ 07661

201-261-3366 Tel 201-261-0117 Fax

pambill22@verizon.net