

Jesus healed every kind of disease and sickness among the people

by M. de l'Esperança Amill Rocamora

«Jesus went all over Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news about God's kingdom. He also healed every kind of disease and sickness among the people» (Mt 4,23)

Mt 4,23, by way of summary of Jesus' messianic action, describes the three constituent elements of his ministry in Galilee —teaching, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing. Jesus acts as a teacher, messenger of the Gospel and therapist; both his words and his works manifest the salvific action of God. Jesus' healings concretize in a sensitive and tangible way the reign of God. Jesus not only teaches and announces the good news of the Kingdom but he heals all kinds of diseases and illnesses of people.

The healings show and confirm that Jesus is truly authorized to proclaim and inaugurate the kingdom of heaven, to act in the salvific time that has already arrived: «The blind are now able to see, and the lame can walk. People with leprosy are being healed, and the deaf can hear. The dead are raised to life, and the poor are hearing the good news» (Mt 11:5). These healings are signs that the Kingdom of Heaven has already begun on earth. They are signs that God's world, with his saving force, has broken into our human world. Whoever receives with faith the proclamation of Jesus becomes a son and heir of the Kingdom.

The gospel according to Matthew has gathered in a single section (8,1-9,34) nine prodigious actions that illustrate the therapeutic activity of Jesus, most of which are healings of sick or disabled people, both in body and spirit. The section groups these actions three by three.

The Messiah in facts (8,1-9,34): section of healings

- a | - Healing of man with a skin disease (8,1-4)
- a | - Healing of a centurion's servant –pagan, foreigner– (8,5-13)
- a | - Healing of Peter's mother-in-law –a woman– and other sick people (8,14-17)
- b | - Following Jesus: the case of a scribe (8,18-22)
- a | - The storm calmed (8,23-27)
- a | - Healing of two demon-possessed men from Gadara –non-Jewish territory– (8,28-34)
- a | - Healing of a paralytic (9,1-8)
- b | - Following Jesus: the case of Matthew, a tax-collector (9,9-13). The fasting (9,14-17)
- b | - Healing of a woman suffering flow of blood and a girl restored to life (9,18-26)

- | | |
|---|---|
| a | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Healing of two blind men (9,27-31) - Healing of a mute demon-possessed man (9,32-34) |
|---|---|

The first grouping includes the healing of man with a skin disease (8,1-4), the healing of a centurion's servant (8,5-13) and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and other sick people (8,14-17).

Let's stop at Mt 8,5-13, the text of the healing of the centurion's servant.

«When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.” And he said to him, “I will come and cure him”. The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this’ and the slave does it”. When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will take their places at the banquet with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”. And Jesus said to the centurion: “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith”. And the servant was healed in that hour» (Mt 8,5-13).

We are facing an unusual situation: the pagan centurion of Capernaum, a foreigner, goes out to meet Jesus, the Jewish prophet. He asks for the healing of his servant (the Greek term *παῖς* can also be read as “son / youth”), who is lying at home paralyzed in terrible distress. Jesus' response expresses his willingness to go to the sick man's house, despite the reluctance of the Jews to enter the house of a pagan: Entering means transgressing the rules of ritual purity required by the Law of Moses.

Perhaps for this reason, in the version of Luke (7,1-10), Jesus is accompanied to the centurion's house by the religious leaders of Capernaum. In fact, the centurion himself is aware of the difficulties involved in his request. But he is a man full of confidence in the word of Jesus and he is moved by the affection that he professes to his servant. That is why he insists close to Jesus, telling him that just one word from him is enough to overcome the illness of the servant. The centurion's words reveal the feelings of humility of that man and his absolute confidence in the power of the word of Jesus. For a soldier, the argument is clear: he knows well the value and authority of a word, of an order given to his soldiers.

He does not therefore doubt the word of Jesus. It is not necessary for him to enter his house. He doesn't need to enter his house.

Jesus publicly praises the faith of that man, a foreigner, who in this way surpasses the people of Israel's own children. The inexhaustible faith of the centurion announces a paradox. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the fathers of the chosen people, will have as table companions people from east and west. On the other hand, those who now listen to the word of Jesus, but do not accept it, can be excluded from the Kingdom. The centurion, on the other hand, welcomes Jesus from humility. Therefore, without knowing it, he has a splendid future in front of him: to live as a son of the Kingdom forever.

The praise of Jesus to the pagan centurion for his faith is the praise of all those who in our world seek God. Many times the saving word of the Gospel does not reach them because of self-interested obstacles or because of the noise of so many banal messages that exist in our society. For Christians, there is the risk of keeping the Gospel, the word of life, enclosed in the fence of our ecclesial context, as if it were an inheritance that we do not want or do not know how to share. The gospel, however, must be communicated. The Church feels heir to the missionary commission of the Risen Lord: «Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit» (Mt 28,19). But the gospel is lived thanks to a faith sustained by the sacraments, in particular by the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic liturgy collects the words that the centurion addressed to Jesus; before approaching to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, the Lord, before welcoming him into our home, we recite: «Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.» The Eucharist is a gift that goes far beyond our weakness and our indignity.

A faith like that of the centurion, which Jesus praises, is made of the recognition of one's own shortcomings and of great confidence in the person of Jesus. He, the Son of God, makes us taste the tender mercy of the Father.

The second group of prodigious actions that illustrate the therapeutic activity of Jesus includes the story of the storm calmed (8,23-27), the healing of two demon-possessed men from Gadara (8,28-34) and the healing of a paralytic (9,1-8).

The third grouping includes the healing of a woman suffering flow of blood and a girl restored to life (9,18-26), the healing of two blind men (9,27-31) and the healing of a mute demon-possessed man (9,32-34).

Let us stop now at Mt 9,18-26. The text is made up of two stories of miracles, that of the healing of a woman suffering flow of blood interspersed with the story of a girl restored to life.

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live”. And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she was saying to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well”. Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well”. And the woman was made well from that moment. When Jesus came to the leader’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping”. And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread through all of that district.

I invite you to focus our attention for a few minutes on the story of the healing of the woman suffering flow of blood, also reading the parallel text of the Gospel of Mark (Mc 5,24b-34).

The evangelist does not give us the name of the woman, but he does point out the suffering she suffers and the firmness in her decision to touch Jesus. Jesus, at first, is presented playing a passive role in the scene; the force of the narrative is not focused on the power of Jesus to perform miracles, but on the woman who takes the initiative and, as a result, receives the effect of the miracle.

What the disease means to her physically only she can know. What disease means to her at the relational level and to family life, only his closest circle can know. But the evangelist seems to know the intimacy of this woman and makes her suffering his own, knowledge and suffering that he wants to share with the reader. The reader, moreover, due to the religious context in which the woman lives, knows that the status of the woman makes her impure according to the law and knows the implications that this entails in the social and religious life of the woman.

The story of the healing of the woman suffering flow of blood, which is inserted in the episode of the girl restored to life, presents the typical characteristics of a miracle story, where the healing power of Jesus who reaches the sick woman by touch.

According to the Torah, the woman is the source and focus of impurity (Lv 15,19-27). The implications of Jewish religious law for the woman who suffers flow of blood condition her entire life, her own existence. This woman is legally unclean as a result of her illness and, therefore, she is part of the marginalized groups within the society of Israel. Furthermore, the woman is the image of the unfaithful people who have profaned the name of the Lord (cf. Ez 36,17) and, as

such, kept in a situation of inferiority and marginalization by the rigorous circles of the Jewish people, separated from the chosen people.

As we read in the book of Ezekiel, the precepts are from the Lord and He Himself made them known to his people, decrees that give life to those who comply with them (cf. Ez 20,11). But in the story we are talking about, the evangelist shows us a case, that of the woman flow of blood, in which the Law and the commandments that the Lord wrote and gave to Moses to instruct the Israelites have become in a dead letter, a letter that deprives life. The norms on ritual purity and impurity, dictated to respect the sanctity of the Lord, sanctity understood as the communion of man with the holy God and who sanctifies everything, have become for women a declaration of impurity, a letter that deprives her of life: it keeps her apart from the family, marginalized from the people, away from God.

Jeremiah tells us that it is the Torah written by God on hearts that gives life (cf. Jr 31,33b). Paul will tell us that the force of life is not given by tablets of stone or the material where the law is written, not even by flesh or blood, nor by ink, nor did he write it without the intervention of God (cf. 2Co 3,5); it is the Spirit that has and gives the strength of life (cf. 2Co 3,3).

Faced with the manifest contrast in the case of this anonymous woman between what the Law dictates and the gift of life, the evangelist, in the story we are reading, shows us how this woman does not allow herself to be annulled by the Law, she does not resign herself to living according to what Jewish law dictates, she does not resign herself to living without a family, or marginalized from the people, and even less deprived of God.

The woman had heard about Jesus and she inside knows that he can heal her, she knows that the alternative of life begins with Jesus: «If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.» The woman, moved by her suffering and, at the same time, by her conviction, takes the initiative to “touch” Jesus, but knows that it is He who has the healing force, salvation will come through Jesus Christ, He will be the author, That is why she thinks: «I will be made well/saved.» The miracle of Jesus, in this story, consists in allowing himself to be touched by the woman, offering her a purifying contact.

In the middle of the people the woman approaches him. She does not directly ask Jesus for healing; she just approaches him back, incognito, discreetly. In other circumstances, it is Jesus who touches to heal; here the opposite occurs, it is Jesus who is touched by the sick woman who seeks healing. It is a “touch” ἥψατο “from behind” ὀπίσθεν, an indirect touch, because “touching the clothes”, as the woman thought, was enough to receive the supernatural healing force that the miracle worker possessed.

The magical interpretation of how the reader could stay will be corrected shortly by the evangelist and the reader will know that the healing force is determined by faith (v. 22). At the moment, in v. 21 the narrator makes the event comprehensible to us, lets us know what thought, what motivation did the woman have to touch the fringe of his cloak: «If I only touch his cloak, I will be saved» σωθήσομαι, I will be healed of my disease. The woman trusts in the healing power of Jesus, the passive verb I will be saved, expresses her certainty in the expected result.

The healing of the disease is linked to the salvation of God. Jesus, who specifically embodies and manifests God's salvific action, without reproaching her, says to the woman: «Daughter; your faith has saved/made you well.» The reader and everyone present on the scene already have the “demonstration,” the confirmation of the miracle. Furthermore, the woman is at the same time the subject of the healing and the witness of the miracle. The anonymous woman who emerges from the people incognito at the beginning of the story and who disappears again among the people when she feels healed, she is called “daughter” by Jesus.

The woman, because of her illness, is in a state of impurity. According to what is established in the Law of Moses, everything that she touches will also remain in a state of impurity. The woman, Jesus, the reader and all those present at the scene, knowers of the Law of Moses, know it. But she intentionally makes the gesture of “touching” Jesus and He allows himself to be touched by the woman. From Him comes a healing force that communicates life and that “touching” takes on a totally different meaning. Salvation is expressed on the level of personal contact. That gesture of the sick woman who, according to the Torah, had to leave Jesus in a state of impurity, becomes a salvific gesture: Jesus cures her and she can once again live with her family and among the people; furthermore, Jesus sanctifies the woman, makes her capable again of being in communion with God.

Salvation is expressed at the level of personal contact: the woman touches Jesus' cloak and immediately knows she is healed (cf. Mk 5,29), while Jesus feels the healing force emanating from within (cf. Mk 5,30) and that has been communicated through his dress. Jesus and the woman “know in their body”, “in their intimacy”, the salvific action.

Only those who are capable of intentionally “to touch” Jesus will be able to perceive and benefit from the “force” that emanating from the inside of him, will be able to know Jesus intimately, to enter into the mystery of Jesus, to know «who Jesus is».

The evangelist makes it very clear that the woman's healing is not the result of a magical action, the healing force is determined by faith. Faith is the essential

condition for healing to be operated, which in turn brings salvation. The woman fully trusts in the healing power of Jesus, she believes in Jesus, she is certain that through Jesus she will be saved. And it is by faith that the miracle happens.

The sick and marginalized woman has been saved moved by faith, the anonymous woman has become a “daughter” and has become an example, a model of faith and of disciple for the listeners present on the scene and for all the gospel readers.

Jesus, ratifying the significance of faith as a means to obtain the salvation that He offers, and recognizing the woman as a “daughter”, openly makes it clear to everyone that He is the Son of God, the suffering servant who takes on his suffering from those who suffer, who allows himself to be touched by those who are tormented and marginalized, the one sent to rescue also those who live under the Torah to bring back the life that has been denied them and return them the dignity accorded to them by the condition received as children of God.