For Personal Reflection

?

1. When Jesus says that sick people need a doctor, how does that make me feel?
2. In what ways am I 'sick?' In what ways am I in need of healing? In what ways am I in need of remedy?
3. Of the remedies that Francis de Sales outlines from the "chemist's shop" that is the Church, which one most appeals to me? Why? Which one do I find most challenging? Why?
4. What are the things about me and/ or about that life that may cause me to hesitate seeing the divine physician who is Jesus Christ? What steps might I take to reduce my anxieties around seeking the remedies that I need to get—and remain—healthier?

Further Reading

Pulpit and Pew: A Study in Salesian Preaching. Vincent Kerns, MSFS. S.F. S. Printing School. India: Visakhapatnam, 1976.

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The Doctor...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

Is In!

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:12)

In a sermon given in September 1619 at the Visitation community at Bourges, Francis spends some time unpacking Jesus' statement above: "Everything the great Craftsman makes is perfect. When he made the world, all that it contained was very good and beautiful: no spot or blemish anywhere...God made humans innocent, free from any fear of weakness or disease. Eve, however, was led astray and involved in transgression. Because she ate the forbidden fruit, persuading her husband to do the same, all their posterity is tainted with sin."

"Sick people who are honest with themselves will willingly do what the doctor says, and take the remedies which he suggests: they are more likely to completely recover."

Made in God's image and likeness, Francis de Sales insists that we are good. Nevertheless, we are, at the same time, impacted by the transgressions of our 'First Parents" which often causes us to fall short of God's expectations of us. "We have to face it," he observed, "that we, too, are suffering from the serpent's bite. Only if we realize that we are weak and sick shall we turn to the physician for help. The sooner we recognize and admit our weakness, the sooner we shall be cured. If we believe ourselves to be healthier, stronger and more full of life than we actually are, then we are sick indeed and in the greatest of dangers."

To illustrate his point, Francis sets up this distinction: "Sick people, who refuse to accept this fact, will not follow a doctor's advice nor take his medicine. They believe that they do not need such things; instead of getting better, they eventually die. On the other hand, sick people who are honest with themselves will willingly do what the doctor says, and take the remedies which he suggests: they are more likely to completely recover."

"Sick people, who refuse to accept this fact, will not follow a doctor's advice nor take his medicine."

When it comes to Jesus—the Divine Physician—the doctor is, indeed, always "in." How do we avail ourselves of his healing services?

Francis directs our attention to the Church itself which "is like a chemist's (*pharmacist's*) shop, stocked with priceless health-producing remedies. These remedies are the sacraments left to us by our savior as cures for all our weaknesses."

He then proceeds to enumerate the sources of our divine-created cures. "The sacrament of baptism removes all trace of the sores of original sin, heals the breech between our souls and God, and makes us his children. The sacrament of penance absolves us from all our sins, mortal or venial. It is only necessary when there is question of mortal sin, but since there is sufficient matter for absolution in venial sins, it is a good thing to confess them, too. The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist makes us one with Christ, providing us with life and food for our souls. Did not our Lord say that if anyone eats this bread, they will live forever? And the same applies to the other sacraments: in some way each of them minister to our human weakness."

"When it comes to Jesus—the Divine Physician—the doctor is, indeed, always 'in.' How do we avail ourselves of his healing services?"

Many of us eschew the Sacraments for any number of reasons: out of fear; out of shame; out of frustration; for lack of humility; for lack of honesty; for lack of faith. No doubt aware of this fact, Francis de Sales remarked: "What does it mean to be a Christian? Surely, one who is anointed, one who needs strengthening because he is weak: and doesn't that description exactly fit our own plight? Did not St. Paul, carried up as he was into the third heaven, admit his weakness and appeal for some one to set him free from a nature doomed to humiliations? Both he—and we—have the answer in our Lord's words to the crowds who came to him to be cured of their diseases. All the multitude was eager to touch him, because power went out from him, and he healed them all, saying: "Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened and I will give you rest.'" (Matthew 11:28)

The doctor is in. What are we waiting for?