**Lord, make me whole again!**

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**By Dan Schutte**

Sometimes we mistakenly think that our faith is primarily about understanding the truths of our faith, or professing a particular creed of beliefs, or learning the Holy Scriptures. Our faith, at its core, is about our relationship with God, and with Jesus, the one who showed us the face of God.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, best known for his handbook for retreats, truly understood this. His Spiritual Exercises are essentially a journey with Jesus. Through a series of “contemplations,” a retreatant follows Jesus through his life, from birth to Resurrection. By watching Jesus, listening, and spending time with Him, a person is drawn into a deeper relationship with Him. Jesus becomes both our Lord and our friend, and we become his disciples. This is the heart of our faith.

The following prayer exercise is loosely based on the Spiritual Exercises. Its goal is the same: to draw a person into a real, living, growing relationship with Jesus.

**Preparation**
Begin this exercise by finding a quiet place where you won’t be disturbed. Spend a few moments centering yourself, taking several slow, deep breaths, and focusing on the presence of God in you and around you. Ask for the grace to come to know Jesus more intimately, to understand his mind and heart, and to love Him more completely. When you’re ready, continue with the following reflection.

**Reflection**
Today we watch Jesus as He responds with great compassion to a man who cries out for healing. As you read the Gospel account, use the imaginative prayer of contemplation to enter more deeply into the story. The goal is to allow the scene to become real, as if it were happening right before you. Take the Scripture line by line as you watch the faces and hear what’s being said. Let the scene unfold in your imagination. There’s no need to rush.

 *As He approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” Then he shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to Him; and when he came near, He asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The man said, “Lord, let me see again.” Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God. (Luke 18:35-43)*

When you finish, as a way of deepening the contemplation, prayerfully read the following reflection. Take note of anything that strikes you as significant.

**Reflection**
It is not easy to admit that we are flawed. We are often embarrassed by our inadequacies, whether it be a physical flaw, a mental disorder, or a spiritual wound. Life is hard, and none of us escapes some form of brokenness. And there are poignant moments when we’d like to cry out to God, “Lord, make me whole again!” We’d like to hope that healing is possible but are often told that we should be more realistic and just keep quiet.

The blind man in the Gospel story refuses to be silenced by the crowd around him. One can only imagine their taunting: “Why would He pay any attention to you? Look at your miserable life! Do you really believe that He’d stop to talk with you?” Behind the blind man’s persistence is a deep faith that Jesus would listen to his pleas.

Sometimes, however, we just don’t want to be healed. We’d rather hold on to the spiritual and emotional hurt we carry — for example from the times we were verbally abused as children, or the abandonment we felt when our spouse walked out on our marriage, or the anger we felt when we were betrayed by a close friend.

The first step to healing is realizing how much we are loved. It is so moving to watch how Jesus treats those who are disfigured and broken. Jesus pays special attention to them and treats them with amazing reverence. He tells the crowd to bring the blind man to Him. One can imagine the kindness with which Jesus looks at the man. He doesn’t focus on the man’s infirmity but simply asks him what he wants. It’s such a reverent, loving thing to do. He never blames the man for his blindness, even though in his culture this kind of physical infirmity was seen as a punishment from God for some sinful transgression. Healing comes to us when we stop blaming ourselves for the bad things that happen to us.

When God reaches out with healing grace, it is not just for the sake of making us whole. God heals us from something so that we might be able to extend that same healing to the world beyond us. The kindness and compassion of Jesus embrace the blind man so that he in turn may become kind and compassionate toward others.

In our life, we will come across people who are in need of God’s compassion and healing mercy. Before they can hear about God, they need someone to speak words of encouragement, a friend to hear the hurt they are carrying, or a faith pilgrim who’s willing to share his or her own journey of faith. Great healing can come in sharing our hurts with someone who has also known pain, hurt, and misfortune. Our willingness to pass on the compassion of God is the way we give thanks for the healing that’s come to us.

**Closing prayer**
Close your eyes and imagine yourself in the presence of Jesus. Let Him look at you with great love and kindness. When you’re ready, continue with the following prayer, or with a prayer in your own words. Speak to God as a friend speaks to a friend.

**Dear, gentle Jesus,
my faith is tender.
I come to You
needing to know that You love me.
Only in your presence can I find the courage
to look at my brokenness
and to see myself as You see me.
Help me to let the power of your love
reach into those painful places in my heart
that are bruised and need healing.
Let me rest for a moment
in the comfort of your embrace.**

**Dan Schutte**

*Dan Schutte is a composer, known for such hymns as “Here I Am, Lord,” “You Are Near,” and “Table of Plenty.” This prayer exercise is adapted from Schutte’s book, Walking the Sacred Path: Spiritual Exercises for Today, available from Twenty-Third Publications (23rdpublications.com), 800-321-0411.*