

Homily based on the readings from December 14, 2025 (Isaiah 35.1-6a, 10; James 5.7-10; Matthew 11.2-11)

Throughout most of human history, people have grappled with the relationship between sickness and sin. While there is certainly a connection between the two, it is not what many people envision. One of the most damaging misrepresentations – which, unfortunately, still persists to this day – is that physical illness is a form of punishment, that God is exacting some sort of retribution for sinful behavior. It is an unspeakable act of cruelty to accuse people – who already have to contend with *unimaginable* hardships – of being the authors of their own affliction. Jesus himself was confronted with this mindset during his earthly ministry. The Gospel of John describes how, after encountering a man who was born blind, his disciples had the impertinence to ask who it was that had sinned, “this man or his parents.” Jesus, of course, immediately set them straight – explaining that the situation was not a matter of blame or punishment, but an opportunity for God’s mercy.

In my own experience, and perhaps yours as well, people suffering from debilitating diseases have been among the kindest and most generous individuals I have ever known. It is not my place to speculate as to why people behave the way they do, but it seems almost obvious that the *pain* these individuals have endured has increased their sympathy for the suffering of others. A person's illness also tends to bring out the lovingkindness of family members and other caretakers – a situation I have personally witnessed more times than I can count. None of us will ever be able to understand why certain people are faced with specific challenges, but all of us can use these kinds of obstacles as an opportunity to grow in our own compassion.

As we all know, there is no more *profound* example of the transformation of pain and suffering into *love* than Christ's own agony on the Cross. Not only was Jesus completely innocent – of all sin, let alone the particular offenses of which he was accused – but he was actually suffering in atonement for the sins of *literally* everybody else. One of the main reasons we receive the Sacrament of Anointing of the

Sick is to unite our own suffering to that of Jesus. To quote the

Catechism:

By the grace of this sacrament the sick person receives the strength and the gift of uniting himself more closely to Christ's Passion. ...

Suffering ... acquires a new meaning; it becomes a participation in the saving work of Jesus. (1521)

In other words, not only is sickness *not* the result of a person's misdeeds, but it is actually an opportunity to grow closer to Christ.

Nevertheless, there is still an essential connection between sin and sickness – which, to a certain extent, is the focus of today's readings.

The reading we just heard from the Book of Isaiah declares:

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,

the ears of the deaf be cleared;

then will the lame leap like a stag,

then the tongue of the mute will sing.

This passage is echoed by Christ's response to the disciples of John the Baptist, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

[T]he blind regain their sight,
the lame walk,
lepers are cleansed,
the deaf hear,
the dead are raised,
and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.

At a basic level, Jesus is recounting the mercy he has shown to the sick and the suffering, whom he has encountered throughout his travels. The healings recorded in Scripture were not performed to *impress* people, but as an inevitable consequence of Christ's boundless compassion. On the other hand, Jesus is also demonstrating that he possesses the unique ability to bring about healing – from physical infirmities, to be sure, but more importantly from the sickness of sin.

As we already know, the physical and mental infirmities with which we are so familiar – cancer, heart attack, hemophilia, dementia, and the like – are never a punishment for an individual’s sin. What *is* true, though, is that sin *itself* is a form of sickness – one that is far more deadly than anything covered by our health insurance. You probably remember the story of Jesus healing the paralytic at Capernaum. His first response when he met the suffering man was to tell him “[c]ourage, child, your sins are forgiven.” It was only as an afterthought that he directed him to “[r]ise and walk.” Because Christ has the power to heal the *greatest* sickness – the sickness of sin – he also has the ability to cure all of our other illnesses and afflictions.

And so, as we prepare to celebrate Christ’s Nativity, less than two weeks from today, we must join together with all the men and women who have come before us in the faith – fully entrusting ourselves, body and soul, to the inexhaustible mercy of our Risen Lord. *He forgives all our iniquities, he heals all our diseases.* No matter what afflictions we may

face – sickness, sorrow, pain, or woe – nothing in this world can ever extinguish that fundamental source of *joy*.