

Love and Health

A large group of Cursillistas sat and talked about Rollos' the other night in a room where Fr. Junípero Serra sat and talked his own Christian action. The Mission walls heard a lot of Cursillo over the decades. Now, in this group there was an infant with her young adult parents, some old timers checking out Cursillo after a few decades away, at least three cancer survivors, one person just out of surgery, some people carrying recent grief and a host of other stories – both high and low. Cursillo filled the room nicely and later, as an anthropologist, I started thinking about love and health in the Cursillo movement.

The connection between love and health is described in Proverbs 4. Here the spiritual “path of the righteous” provides health to “all their body” and, concurrently, the physical and emotional health of the heart brings forth “the springs of life”.

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
That shines brighter and brighter until the full day.
The way of the wicked is like darkness;
They do not know over what they stumble.
My son, give attention to my words;
Incline your ear to my sayings.
Do not let them depart from your sight;
Keep them in the midst of your heart.
For they are life to those who find them
And health to all their body.
Watch over your heart with all diligence,
For from it flow the springs of life.

Proverbs 4:18-23 (New American Standard Bible)

Love and health are often taken for granted, when we have them. It is easy for me to be lackadaisical in my love of God and love of neighbor. In my practice towards Cursillo piety, I have a standing prayer where I talk to God and ask, “God, do you know how much I love you?” much like Jesus’ conversation with Peter and then roles reversed. Being of Irish tradition, I can go a time talking more to God in my head; than to my wife here beside me. Every day I need to voice and to act my profound love for her. I have the same need to say “I love” to my children, and also to my aging parents. I need to voice it and not take it for granted. Voiced love naturally rolls into action to be a better neighbor and friend.

Health is also taken for granted until something happens. Before we left the Garden of Life, we were never sick. Illness, disease and disaster entered our world when Satan tricked us with our self-will. Now, suffering is here to stay until our Christian mission and Cursillo movement overcome it. Health and healing are prominent in the ministry of Jesus, and also in Cursillo. Jesus has the compassion and the power to heal any and all ailments and that healing power of Jesus is passed on to us both as a sacrament and as a

Cursillo charism. We “bring spiritual strength to those who are physically ill, not only by reminding them that they are loved and forgiven by God but also by reassuring them of God’s concern for their physical well-being.” (Martos, Doors to the Sacred, 2001, p346) That is what we do in Cursillo when we know someone is hurting either in love or in health. We do it in small groups, we do it one on one, and we do it as a liturgy. Some years ago, my neighbor’s house was circled by a thousand candles as Cursillo sang him a song of love from the darkness of the night. The night closed in on my neighbor John but I am sure his journey was well lit.

Love and health. They seem to be similar states of experience. Love is spiritual but needs to be expressed in the world physically. Love in my head is just philosophy and I need to get it out into the world more often for more people. Health is physical but has perhaps our deepest spiritual lessons. Unfortunately, the teacher is ill-health. As Roman Catholics, we believe in redemptive suffering, that our sickness and maladies, when accepted and joined to Jesus, can further our joining the Kingdom of God. Pope John Paul II speaks extensively on both the suffering of love and the suffering of ill-health. If you are sick or in grief, I suggest printing out Salvifici Doloris and reading it over the course of a year or two. Go to the Vatican at:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html

A short interpretation of Pope John Paul II’s “Meaning of Human Suffering” can be found at: http://www.frtommylane.com/homilies/year_a/22-2.htm

To conclude, let me share with you how I integrate love and health into my prayer life. I find that exercise, particularly swimming in the ocean, moves me to open communication with God. Words diffuse into the ocean. If I am looking down into the deep, I pray mostly thankfulness. I do my family and saints prayers at sunrise, so here in the water it’s gratitude. Sometimes a shadow startles me to pray in fear but, not yet eaten, I go back to gratitude and thankfulness. When I swim on my back, looking at the cloud shapes, I pray out into the Cursillo community. A cloud might remind me of a hurt heart, a bent limb, a cancer. The clouds guide my direction and I pray out and up into a sky of special intentions. That’s the prayer swim method! I go back and forth, facing down, facing up, and combining love and health as a Cursillista. I am sure that God picks up the signals.

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good **health** and that all may go well with you, **even as your soul is getting along well.** 3 John 1:2 (New International Version)

Patrick O’Brien
Lay Director
jpobrien@cox.net