

# MODELS FOR HEALING PRAYER IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

## The Healing Ministry of Jesus; the Passion of Christ; the Consecration

*Penelope Olive*

I WAS IN THE FINAL YEAR of formation when my teachers Patricia O'Neill and Carl Krull invited me to present the topic of healing prayer to my fellow spiritual directors at the Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Montreal.<sup>1</sup> Four weeks before I was to give the presentation, two things happened that threw into question all that I believed about healing ministry: a friend died just two months after being diagnosed with cancer; and my daughter-in-law Sarah, who had already been battling breast cancer for three years, was told that there was a metastasis in her bones. 'The spots are very small', she told me.

I was plunged into despair and sadness. Then came the doubts: did I imagine all these healings of the past? Does God really heal us? As I prayed my way through the sadness of my friend's death, the news of Sarah's illness and the assailing doubts about healing, I read two texts: *God Can Do It Again*, by Kathryn Kuhlman, and *Why Some People Are Not Healed*, by Rufus Womble.<sup>2</sup> Womble's booklet reminded me that prayer is an encounter with a living God, and that we are active participants in our healing prayers, for ourselves and for others: we do not pray to a god of wood or stone (Isaiah 37:17–19); neither is God a vending machine into which we put our petition and out pops the answer.

Kuhlman's book contains cover-to-cover accounts of miraculous healings. I was reminded of the many healings that I had seen in others and

*This article is dedicated to the memory of Sarah, who lived her passion to the fullest.*

<sup>1</sup> The Ignatian Spirituality Centre of Montreal, [www.ignatiancentremtl.ca](http://www.ignatiancentremtl.ca). See Formation Programs and Calendar of Events.

<sup>2</sup> Kathryn Kuhlman, *God Can Do It Again* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1974); Rufus J. Womble, *Why Some People Are Not Healed* (Little Rock: Christian Episcopal Church, 1974).

experienced myself: physical, spiritual, emotional, situational. I thought: if I were to write down all the healings I have seen, they would probably fill a book. Some of these healings were sweet and simple, others quite dramatic: all were accomplished by God.

For a number of years, for example, I have mentored groups of students in a seminar program called Education for Ministry.<sup>3</sup> Iva was a quiet, unassuming student in one of my groups. One day she told me that her son and her daughter-in-law had decided to give up trying to conceive a child after many years and thousands of dollars spent on fertility treatments. I listened to Iva's story, and my heart went out to them. I told Iva that when we read the Old Testament stories about women having babies, it is often written: 'And the Lord opened her womb'.<sup>4</sup> I prayed a simple prayer for Iva, asking the Lord to open her daughter-in-law's womb. Not long after our prayer, her daughter-in-law conceived, and they had a beautiful baby girl.

As I remembered these things, all doubt about healing left me.

### ***My Involvement in the Healing Ministry***

I first came to the healing ministry in 1989 under the auspices of the Order of Saint Luke the Physician (OSL).<sup>5</sup> When a woman at our church made the announcement that they would be giving a course for anyone called to the healing ministry, I felt a strong urge to go. But I also knew that the Lord would not want me to do anything that my husband felt was not right for me. And so, right there in the pew, in the middle of the Gloria, I prayed to the Lord. A moment later my husband, Jack, turned to me and said, 'Why don't you join the healing ministry?'. I had received my call.

In 2000, I started the Montreal chapter of the OSL, of which I am convener.<sup>6</sup> The work consisted of training and equipping people from various denominations for healing ministry, using the initial Bible study project of the OSL entitled *The Healing Ministry of Jesus*. This workbook is unique in that it contains all the accounts of Jesus healing that can be

<sup>3</sup> Education for Ministry is a programme of theological education by extension for lay people, involving four years of study in scripture, church history, theology and ethics. See [www.sewanee.edu/EFM](http://www.sewanee.edu/EFM) or [www.efmcanada.ca](http://www.efmcanada.ca)

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 29: 31; Genesis 30: 22; 1 Samuel 1: 19–20.

<sup>5</sup> The Order of St. Luke is an ecumenical organization dedicated to the Christian healing ministry. See [www.orderofstluke.org](http://www.orderofstluke.org).

<sup>6</sup> OSL members meet in local chapters to study scripture, specifically the biblical stories of the healing miracles, as well as additional books on Christian healing. Members also engage in healing prayer, often with the laying on of hands.

found in the Bible. I translated the English workbook into French and I now lead participants through these Bible studies in both languages.

In 2005 I met Thomas Dowd and the Catholic Charismatic Services of Montreal steering committee for the renewal of the healing ministry in the English Diocese of Montreal.<sup>7</sup> A month later, Father Dowd called me and asked if I would take on the responsibility for training and ongoing formation for anyone called to the healing ministry. I said yes. Father Dowd selected training materials for us: in Year One, *The Healing Ministry of Jesus* OSL Bible study project, and in Year Two, Christian Healing Ministries' *School of Healing Prayer* DVD series by Judith and Francis MacNutt. This series offers teachings on various aspects of healing, including sin, praying for forgiveness, understanding generational healing, healing of spiritual abuse, how to pray for inner healing, conception to birth prayer and healing of sexual abuse.

As I thought about how I would present the topic of healing prayer in spiritual direction, I decided to share from my experience in the healing ministry, drawing on three models from the life of Jesus.

### ***The Healing Ministry of Jesus***

My first experience, a physical healing, happened six months ago following our 5.00 p.m. Sunday Mass at Jesus Light of the World Parish. One of our Ministers of Communion did not go up to the altar when it was time for her to do so. I saw that Nila was upset, and I asked someone to take her place.<sup>8</sup> I went to see her after Mass; she was in tears. Her head was down, and her long dark hair was covering her face. She told me that she had been diagnosed that morning with Bell's Palsy after emergency admission to hospital. As she looked up at me, I could see that the left side of her face was quite different from the right. I asked her if I could pray for her, and she agreed. I invited a couple of women we knew to join us, and we prayed for her straight away. As we prayed, I had the thought to ask our priest, Francis McKee, to give Nila the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (James 5:14–15). We ended our prayer, and I asked Nila if she would like to receive the sacrament, explaining to her that it was a sacrament for healing. She said yes, and I went to see Father Francis.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Dowd is now Roman Catholic auxiliary bishop of Montreal. See Bishop Tom's Blog, [www.bishopdowd.net](http://www.bishopdowd.net) and <https://twitter.com/bishopdowd>.

<sup>8</sup> I asked Nila permission to share her story. She smiled, looked up to heaven, and said, 'oh yes, we have to share about all that God does, I'm so grateful'. And I got another hug.



Again we gathered around her as he gave her the Anointing of the Sick. When he had finished the prayers, she had a smile on her face, and her eyes were glistening with tears. She looked peaceful, and I remember thinking that she looked quite beautiful. The next Sunday she was well, and remains well to this day.

In the book *To Heal as Jesus Healed*, Barbara Shlemon speaks about the confusion surrounding the use of the Sacrament of the Anointing, formerly understood by many people as the final anointing.<sup>9</sup> She also speaks of the importance of appropriating the power for healing, not only through prayers for physical healing, but also through the sacrament itself. For directees in faith communities that offer this sacrament or something similar, it can be worth suggesting if they are experiencing serious health concerns. After receiving the Anointing of the Sick at my parish a couple of years ago, I myself experienced relief of all pain from the mild arthritis with which I had been diagnosed. It remains to be seen how far I have been healed of the arthritis itself, as this can be clarified only through my next bone density scan. In the meantime, I am very thankful to the Lord that I have been healed of the pain.

In healing prayer, the Lord may put something into our hearts that we can suggest to the directee (1 Corinthians 12:8). I have asked permission to share one such story from a directee. Marie is an upbeat, proactive

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Leahy Shlemon, Dennis Linn and Matthew Linn, *To Heal as Jesus Healed* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1978).

woman. Her faith in God is expressed with joy and trust. She has suffered a number of losses in her life: two close friends died when she was a young adult; she was with both of her parents when they peacefully passed away. Two years before, Marie had suffered the sudden loss of a colleague, and expressed anger that her friend had not been more vigilant about his health. Then, a year later, a cousin became ill, and Marie expressed frustration at her response: she was not trying to eat; her attitude was not positive. The cousin passed away that summer, and Marie was stunned at the suddenness of her death. As more people in her circle became ill, Marie used a phrase a number of times that stood out for me. She would say, 'Well, we're all dying'.

Marie developed a cough that would not go away, and was often tired. She went for a check-up, and was given a few referrals. The results were good: medically all was well. However the diagnosis was that her condition was trauma related. Marie spoke about how she 'manages' difficulties: 'I set difficulties aside, and use the energy to get a lot of things done'. Marie had also been praying three prayers for detachment attributed to St Ignatius of Loyola.<sup>10</sup> She shared with me that she felt that she was not truly giving everything to God and trusting in God. I suggested that this insight was a grace, and that God was blessing her with the opportunity to grow closer to God and to deepen her trust in God: this was the answer to her prayer for detachment. I also suggested that it would be good to take time to grieve, and I gave her a book, *In Times of Grieving*, by Robert Hamma.<sup>11</sup> The cough is now gone.

As we consider the healing ministry of Jesus, we can see that there is always an added element, as it were, to put a seal upon the person for their healing. The healings that Jesus accomplished—and accomplishes today—are always in the context of conversation and acts of compassion: he instructs; he teaches; he touches; he inquires; he comforts; he counsels; he restores; he forgives; he frees.

He calls to acts of service.

He follows up.

<sup>10</sup> See Michael Harter, *Hearts on Fire: Praying with Jesuits* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004), Prayer for Generosity, 58; Suscipe, 153; Prayer for Detachment: 'Grant, O Lord, that my heart may neither desire nor seek anything but what is necessary for the fulfillment of Thy holy Will. May health or sickness, riches or poverty, honors or contempt, humiliations, leave my soul in that state of perfect detachment to which I desire to attain for Thy greater honor and Thy greater glory.'

<sup>11</sup> Robert M. Hamma, *In Times of Grieving: Prayers of Comfort and Consolation* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 2004).

- **Jesus Heals an Official's Son** (John 4: 46–54). Although the royal official asked Jesus twice to come down and heal his son, he 'believed the word that Jesus spoke to him', and on his way home he learnt that his son had been healed at the exact time when Jesus said he would be healed.
- **Simon Peter's Mother-in-Law** (Matthew 8: 14–15; Mark 1: 29–31; Luke 4: 38–39). Jesus stood over her and rebuked the fever from which she was suffering, and it left her; he took her by the hand and lifted her up; then she got up and 'began to serve him'.
- **The Man Born Blind** (John 9: 7). Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and spread the mud on the man's eyes. 'Go', Jesus told him, 'wash in the Pool of Siloam'. The man 'went and washed, and came back able to see'. Jesus later heard that the man had been thrown out of the synagogue and, having found him, revealed himself to be the Son of Man.
- **A Girl Restored to Life** (Matthew 9: 18–19, 23–26; Mark 5: 21–24, 35–43; Luke 8: 40–42, 49–56). When Jesus healed Jairus' daughter, he instructed those who were with him 'to tell no one what had happened' and told the parents to 'give her something to eat'.
- **Jesus Heals a Paralytic** (Matthew 9: 1–8; Mark 2: 1–12; Luke 5: 17–26). Jesus saw the faith of the people who were helping the paralytic. He forgave the paralytic for his sins, and then healed him of the paralysis.

### **The Passion of Christ**

My second experience, the healing of damaged emotions, occurred with Yonnette, a young woman who worked with my husband a number of years ago.<sup>12</sup> She was alone in Canada, having come from Guyana. My father was also from Guyana, so that was our connection. Yonnette was engaged to a young man, Mark, who lived in the United States. They both wanted their citizenship papers: Mark in the USA and Yonnette here in Canada. We introduced them to our priest, who agreed to do their marriage preparation, even though it would be long-distance with Mark.

<sup>12</sup> See David A. Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1991). This text is on the recommended reading list for Francis and Judith MacNutt's CHM School of Healing Prayer, level 2.

Yonnette and Mark got married, but continued to live apart. Yonnette found this very difficult, and we would invite her to stay with us now and then. One day there was a healing mission at our church, and we invited Yonnette to stay so that she could attend. I was not scheduled to be on a prayer team on this particular day, but I remember looking towards the altar and seeing Yonnette kneeling there with a prayer team. I remember thinking to myself: 'It's good that she's going for prayer'. At the end of the mission a few prayer team members gathered in the chapel to praise and thank the Lord for all that he had done over the weekend; everyone looked happy and peaceful.

I myself did not feel very good, however. A deep and pervading sadness had come over me, a powerful feeling that was quite foreign to me. I looked at the woman sitting across from me, her eyes glistening with joy, and I explained about the deep sadness that I felt. She immediately knew what to do, and prayed for me. The feeling left me, and as it did, I understood that it was Yonnette's feeling of sadness that had come to me. She was fine after the weekend, still missing Mark, but at peace. Their time of separation soon came to an end, and not long after she gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. They now live together as a family in the United States.

Picking up on negative feelings, or even physical pain, that others may be experiencing is a phenomenon that happens to many of us in the healing ministry.<sup>13</sup> It is nothing to fear, and I have learnt that the Lord always provides a way out from under it. I once prayed with a woman



who was struggling with an eating disorder; afterwards, I had a very strong desire to snack. Before I could stop myself, I was munching cookies like mad. On another occasion, after intercession for a man who was drinking too much wine, I found myself having the urge to have a glass of wine. As neither my husband nor I drink, there was no wine in the house. It was only the next day, when I was shopping, standing in front of

<sup>13</sup> See Francis MacNutt, *Healing: Are There Physical Phenomena that Accompany the Healing Gift?* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1999), 245–247.

rows of wine bottles, that I realised something was clearly amiss. In both of these instances, I turned to Jesus and prayed, using his words: 'Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28). I gave the difficulties I was experiencing into his hands. And rest came.

There are other experiences, such as Yonnette's feeling of deep pervading sadness, where the situation may well call for a person with discernment. Here are a few suggestions to keep in mind to help in similar situations:

1. Speak to someone. Do not struggle through this on your own. As Ignatius instructs in the Thirteenth Rule for Discernment:  

The enemy acts like a false lover, in so far as he tries to remain secret and undetected. For such a scoundrel, speaking with evil intent and trying to seduce the daughter of a good father or the wife of a good husband, wants his words and solicitations to remain secret. But he is deeply displeased when the daughter reveals his deceitful words and evil design to her father, or the wife to her husband. For he easily infers that he cannot succeed in the design he began. (Exx 326)
2. Pray before and after meeting with a person you wish to help. I give prayer cards to each member of our prayer teams: on one side of the card is a Prayer for Protection, to be prayed before ministry; on the other side, a Prayer to Be Set Free, to be prayed after times of ministry. The author of these prayers is Francis MacNutt of Christian Healing Ministries.<sup>14</sup>
3. I also suggest a prayer to put on the whole armour of God. My husband leads us through this scripture prayer every morning; we pray the verses in the first person: 'I am strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. I put on the whole armour of God, so that I may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil', through to verse twenty, 'I pray also that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. I pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.' (Ephesians 6:10–20)

<sup>14</sup> These prayer cards are available through the Christian Healing Ministries bookshop at [www.christianhealingmin.org/bookstore/](http://www.christianhealingmin.org/bookstore/).



Another thought to keep in mind is that the Holy Spirit may be inviting us to intercede on behalf of a person who is suffering. In keeping with this thought, a priest once said to me that I am a 'burden bearer'; but, he told me, I am not to carry these burdens myself, I am to carry them to the cross. 'Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words' (Romans 8:26).

A woman I knew was leaving on a flight from Montreal to her home in the Caribbean. I woke suddenly that night, with the sense that her plane was shaking and that she was frightened and crying out to the Lord. I prayed for her until I felt peaceful. When she returned home, she told me that the plane had gone through a hurricane-level storm; she had prayed and cried out to God, because she was afraid that she was not going to survive.

In his passion, our Lord Jesus Christ shows us that he knows the way through our sufferings:

- His anguished prayers in the *Garden of Gethsemane* show us that he knows what it is to suffer in prayer for ourselves and for others: his sweat became like drops of blood (Mark 14:32–35; Luke 22:43–44).
- The *Scourging at the Pillar* shows us that he knows how the world can beat us up too: physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually (John 19:1; Isaiah 1:6).
- *Crowned with Thorns*, he knows the places where we too have been wounded, mocked, humiliated, rejected and hurt, sometimes beyond imagination (Matthew 27:27–31).
- He shows us how to *Carry Our Cross*, that we are not alone and that the Father sends us help along the way; he shows us that we should not give up: for just as the Father watched over His own Son in his suffering, so too the Father watches over us in our suffering (John 19:17; Luke 23:26).
- *On the Cross* he perseveres to the very end, still showing us the way. Even in his pain, the pain of death, he forgives, he ministers and, yes, he cries out to God, for he is fully human. He commends his spirit to the Father, for us: death no longer has victory (Matthew 27:33–56; Mark 15:22–41; Luke 23:33–49; John 19:18–30).

We can go to Jesus because he understands (Hebrews 5:7). He has lived on the earth, and he knows the way: through life; through death; through life again (Matthew 11:28–30; John 14).

### **The Consecration**

This third experience is my own, a healing of memories.<sup>15</sup> It was the late 1990s. I was working from my home office and just settling in for the morning. The memory of a past hurt kept coming to me, and I struggled to dismiss it. *Have I not already dealt with this, Lord? When will it go away?* I felt the Lord drawing me back to prayer. I was unwilling to look at this experience again, but the urging I felt to come back to prayer was strong and persistent. With a mixture of unwillingness, impatience and obedience, I set aside my work, my notes, my agenda and said out loud: *All right, Lord!*

The memory of the experience came flooding back to me as I sat there. And with it came a surge of feelings: the hurt and rejection that I had pushed down deep inside me so long ago. I felt the Lord asking me to give it all to him on the cross (Matthew 11:28), and I did—the memory and the pain—with tears flowing down my face. Then, though my eyes were closed, I saw, and felt, an incredible, beautiful, warm light coming down through the top of my head and filling me; I knew I was being healed of this memory. I sat quietly, fully aware of love, peace and this beautiful warm light. And as I sat there, I heard in my heart a voice that said: ‘Now when you remember, it will be different’.

I thanked the Lord, and returned to my work. The thought came to me to try to remember the incident. I was amazed: I felt a sense of the beginning moment of the memory, then a fluttering feeling and my heart lifting with joy (Isaiah 43:18–19; Isaiah 65:17). As the days passed, it kept coming to me to try to recall other painful memories. The same thing happened: my heart would lift with joy. I soon realised that I had been given the gift of healing of memories of all of my life’s hurts.

‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.’ (Hebrews 13:8) Jesus can bring healing to our memories, because he is not limited to time and space, as we are. Praying for the healing of memories brings to mind the moment of consecration at the Mass (1 Corinthians 11:23–25).

<sup>15</sup> See Dennis Linn and Matthew Linn, *Healing Life’s Hurts: Healing Memories through the Five Stages of Forgiveness* (New York: Paulist, 1978).

At the last supper, Jesus said to the disciples, 'Do this in remembrance of me'. He provided for the disciples, and for us today, a way of healing from the pain and suffering in our lives. As the disciples continued to celebrate the Lord's Supper, they 'remembered' in a new way the Lord's passion and his cross, and their lives were transformed. Today, when the priest pronounces these words at Mass, 'Do this in remembrance of me', there is profound peace. You can hear a pin drop.

The passion of Christ, his arrest in the garden, the scourging at the pillar, the crowning of thorns, the carrying of the cross, the crucifixion, all this culminates in the consecration of the Mass; Calvary is redeemed and transformed (Matthew 26:26–30).

He has given us an example. We bring our pain and sorrow to the cross, and all is redeemed and transformed; our passion, our Calvary, is redeemed and transformed. Jesus has accomplished what he came to do when he inaugurated the Kingdom of Heaven two thousand years ago at a synagogue in Nazareth:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4:18–19)

As spiritual directors we have a unique opportunity—and privilege—to offer to our directees the gift of prayer for healing in all areas of their lives. And through the transformation of their lives and ours, there will come transformation for the world.

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