

INTRODUCTION



*“The thing the church needs most today
is the ability to heal wounds and to warm
the hearts of the faithful.”*

Pope Francis spends a lot of time talking about healing—not just external recovery from disease, but the deeper, inner healing of the spirit. In his words, he is clear that when all of us come to Christ as wounded people in need of Christ’s merciful healing, all will be changed.

“You have to start from the ground up,” the pope says. So, if we all—aware of the need for healing in our own souls, our homes, our workplaces, and our church—begin to follow his sage advice, who knows what miracles might be wrought?

Here are thirty days’ worth of reflections on Pope Francis’ words on healing. May they bring comfort, hope, and joy in growing closer to God!

The quotes from Pope Francis were chosen by Deborah McCann, who also wrote the reflections and the “Ponder” and “Pray” pieces.

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1 | WHERE DO WE START?

The first reform must be attitude.

As people in recovery from substance abuse know, no recovery can happen until one accepts that one's own efforts have been fruitless. A new way must be found to bring about healing. Pope Francis says the same thing about healing in the church—both the people of God and the institution. Until we are ready to engage God openly and honestly as the imperfect creatures that we are, we will be unaware of just how close God is to us. God is not “out there,” “far away,” “removed.” In fact, as Pope Francis stresses over and over, God comes to meet us where we are. What's keeping us from opening our eyes?

PONDER

Are there areas of my life where I would rather not be healed? Are these the very things that separate me from God?

PRAY

God of healing and hope, help me to face you unafraid!

2 | OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

If we do not enter this temple and be part of this construction in order that the Holy Spirit may dwell in us, we are not in the church.

Pope Francis reminds us that many of us are on the outside looking in, pausing, as it were, “at the reception desk” of the church. But, he says, since we are all members of this temple, body and soul, why do we settle for just observing from the threshold? If we’re honest with ourselves, don’t we often settle for this easier path? In order to achieve true healing, we have to enter and approach the God who is waiting to welcome us.

PONDER

Am I truly close to God in prayer? Or am I standing safely or hesitantly at the doorway?

PRAY

God of healing and hope, guide my steps across the threshold—from fear to trust and from sorrow to joy!

3 | TAKING THE FIRST STEP

[Jesus] draws near to the man and says to him: “Do you want to be healed?” And to the man who replies yes, he gives grace and sends him on his way.

“He gives grace and sends him on his way.” With these words, Pope Francis shows us the true power and depth of Jesus’ healing. Those of us on the threshold may be satisfied with externals, the beautiful wrapping on the gifts we see before us. But God wants us to go further than that, to go deeper into the amazing gift of grace. And it is this grace that gives us the power to take the next step—of *appreciating* the gift. To open this gift means to accept the responsibility to use it well.

PONDER

Am I ready to open the gifts that God is offering me?

PRAY

God of healing and hope, help me to want your grace!

4 | WE'RE ALL HEALED

Within this framework—Jesus prays and Jesus heals—there is all that one can say about the church.

Pope Francis points out that, as the blind man comes slowly to recognize who has restored his sight, so too we must come to understand that Jesus heals, which is a different thing from physical curing. What Jesus offers is the healing of body and soul, offering a serenity of spirit and a desire to share this gift with others. “Jesus prays and Jesus heals”—there can be no better path for us to follow. In your own prayer, consider a time when a prayer was answered, but not in the way you expected. That’s the gift of healing at work.

PONDER

Is there a time in my life that I now realize was a “blessing in disguise”?

PRAY

God of healing and hope, I am as blind as the blind beggar. Help me to see your presence!

5 | TRUE HEALING

When Jesus healed a sick man, he was not only healing, he was forgiving sins.

When Jesus healed the blind man, he was doing far more than giving him a physical ability. He was awakening in him the gift of faith. It is the same way with us. It is very human to demand that God see things our way and that God fix them the way we want them to be fixed. Instead, Pope Francis reminds us, God begins by forgiving our sins and healing our sense of guilt and shame. When we approach God with a genuine desire to be forgiven, when we accept the fact that God is ready to embrace us, then we begin to heal from the inside out!

PONDER

What sins, whether of commission or omission, do I need to have forgiven?

PRAY

God of healing and hope, give me the courage to face up to my failings and welcome your healing!

6 | THE MOST PROFOUND MISSION

*Reconciliation is the re-creation of the world;
and the most profound mission of Jesus is
the redemption of all of us sinners.*

Over the years, the practice of going to confession has fallen off among many practicing Catholics, who find it difficult, or unnecessary, or shameful, to tell their sins to another human being. But if we reflect on Jesus' mission, Pope Francis says, we will begin to see that this is exactly how Jesus begins our inner healing. By sacrificing his life for us all, he opened the doors not only to the heavenly paradise, but to our own possibility of sharing this good news of healing with others. Let the re-creation begin!

PONDER

Am I ready to participate in the world's "re-creation"?

PRAY

God of healing and hope, fill me with the wonder of trusting you!