



Why Pray for the Sick?

Do you ever wonder if it is worth praying for the sick? For the World Day of Prayer for the Sick on 11 February, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, **Fr Vincent Sherlock of Kilmovee, Co. Mayo**, hints at what may happen when we pray for them.

The month of February includes the World Day of Prayer for the Sick and is a timely reminder for a remembrance in prayer for all who are ill at present. What does it mean to pray for the sick? For most of us, it's fair to say, our prayers centre on curing those who are sick and seeing nothing less than their restoration to full health. It's not an unreasonable prayer and yet one that quite often seems to go unanswered.

Where is Jesus in sickness? Where are the miracles and the cures? Could it be the case that Jesus chooses not to cure when it is within his power to make all well again? Should we just give up?

There's a wonderful Gospel story of a paralytic person being carried on a stretcher to Jesus, in the hope – the unspoken prayer – that healing might occur. He was not the only one in need that day and when the destination was reached, the place was so



crowded that it was impossible to get the man close to Jesus. There was no way through. There was, however, a way up! The paralytic person, still on his stretcher, was taken to the roof and an opening was made. He was literally 'lowered' by ropes until he lay at the feet of Jesus.

Imagine this scene. What must people have thought as they saw the man descend on his stretcher until he was brought into the real presence of



Jesus? There would have been shock, no doubt, and maybe anger too – felt by those who were awaiting their chance to be healed. Certainly, it was a moment that could not be ignored. There follows an incredible and encouraging encounter that surely says we must never, ever tire of praying for the sick and accompanying them on their journey.

Jesus, seeing the man before him, first looks to those who carried him.

‘Seeing their faith’, he turns to the man and says to him ‘pick up your stretcher and walk’ (Mt 9:1–8, Mk 2:1–12, Lk 5:17–26). Miracle! Another healing and another chance to walk the roads of life and all made possible and real by Jesus but done in response to the faith of the community – the determination of those who brought the man to Jesus’ feet, that the man might find his faith.

The role of the community, the family, is to never cease praying for the sick and bringing them to the Lord. It is often a tiring journey and one that may not see us arrive at the intended end-point of a physical healing but remains a journey to which we are called and committed. There is a moment in the Gospel story mentioned, where Jesus speaks of sins being forgiven too. A relationship re-established with the Lord has its own place in the healing of the sick – the journey of the pilgrim. We can never be sure where our prayers take those for whom we pray.

It is possible that healing occurs in places of the heart and soul beyond our view. It is possible that even when we can’t see it there’s a falling away of scars and hurt. The ‘cure’ may not be the one sought, nor indeed may it be obvious. Sometimes we see great calmness in the sick when they can become the ones encouraging us. It is likely, perhaps even certain, that an inner-healing has taken place. We should never doubt the part our prayers play in such a journey of acceptance. 💙