

When you get sick, you have to decide what to do. Some people do nothing. They wait, thinking that whatever it is will go away. I'm in that category a lot. Others do everything, leaping into action, demanding immediate professional attention – or just any attention. The world of sickness and medicine is a great mystery, and it is hard to know the right thing to do. There's one thing, though, that almost everybody does when they get sick. Everybody prays. They may do it silently, or they may ask others to help. As a Church we help the sick in many ways. We offer Catholic Health Care all across the country and around the world. Some of our religious orders are dedicated to the sick. And in parishes like ours, the desire to pray for the sick is strong. At every mass we include them in our Prayer of the Faithful because this is what baptized Christians should do: We should pray on behalf of those in need. This parish even has a prayer chain of people connected by email or phone; when someone in the community is sick, our chain hears the news first and offers up the first prayers.

Today's first reading from Acts of the Apostles illustrates how the ministry of healing has been part of the Church's work from the very beginning. After the resurrection, Jesus shared his healing powers with his disciples. People from all over Jerusalem brought the sick to them, in order to be healed. There's even a surprising story about the leader of the disciples, Peter. His healing powers were so strong that people laid the sick on one side of the street where Peter was walking, so that the sun would cast Peter's shadow upon them. Even his shadow brought healing.

So it is not so hard to believe that holy communion can heal. This week we have been welcoming several people to communion for the first time – two young men who were baptized at the Easter Vigil and several children from the parish this weekend. Just as Jesus shared his healing power with his disciples, so we believe that he shares it with us, even during the mass. Many of the prayers we say here call the eucharist a remedy or a medicine for our sins. These prayers imply that our spiritual life experiences sickness, not just our physical life. When you get physically sick, you may wonder if it's because you've done something wrong. Probably not. Sin doesn't necessarily lead to physical sickness, but sin does lead to spiritual sickness, and that requires healing. We acknowledge this at every mass. Just before anyone receives communion we all recite together words inspired by the story of Jesus healing the servant of the centurion: "Lord, I am not worthy. Say the word and I shall be healed." The Church offers spiritual healing every time people receive communion.

First communion reminds us that we can receive and bestow healing as members of the Church. We bestow healing through timely prayer, a word of love, or a gift of help. We receive healing through the prayers of others, the treatment of medical professionals, and the gift of communion. We are not worthy to receive communion, but Christ does not seem to mind. He comes to us anyway, to make us healthy in body and soul, as we share his body and blood.