

JANUARY 15, 2025 FATHER GUSTAVE INEZA

Dear brothers and sisters,

Many biblical scholars concur that Jesus spent more time in this region of the Holy Land than anywhere else. That is in the city of Capernaum and the surroundings. In Capernaum, one can still identify the location of the house where He is said to have healed Peter's mother-in-law. A site upon which a church was later constructed. Some traditions even such as that Jesus resided there for a long period. A home for the Son of Man who famously had no stone where to lay His head, as one Dominican friar ironically observed. If we know where the house where He lived is, we cannot say that He did not have a stone where to lay His head.

Within this house, the narrative unfolds. Jesus encounters Peter's mother-in-law suffering from a high fever. He heals her and her restored vitality comes and she begins to serve them a meal. What might this gospel passage reveal beyond perhaps the fact that Jesus' disciples could not cook a meal? And they had to rely on the person who was sick in the house to be cured by Jesus in order for them to eat. At its core, it underscores the centrality of healing in Jesus' ministry. Healing that was comprehensive and transformative.

As a Jesuit scholar named Edward Malloy notes, the Greek verb "egeiro" meaning "raise" is employed here. A verb also used to describe Christ's resurrection. So, the linguistic comparison suggests a healing that transcends mere physical restoration pointing to a holistic renewal of life itself. In his 2006 book "Jesus Today, A Spirituality of Radical Freedom". A text I cannot help but promote as I proceed, the late Dominican Father Albert Nolan, my esteemed former student-master, profoundly observes some Christians are more than a little embarrassed by Jesus' healing activity.

Can we still believe in miracles today? Besides, we would not like to associate Jesus with most of today's faith healers. And yet, we cannot ignore the historical fact that Jesus was a healer. Fr. Nolan, however, transcends these initial hesitations by emphasizing a pivotal insight. He says Jesus' ministry of healing was holistic. So, dear brothers and sisters, this assertion resonates powerfully with the story of Peter's mother-in-law. Where the verb used to describe her healing also carries the profound meaning of being raised from the dead.

He had the wholeness of Jesus' healing ministry reaffirmed. Healing, however, is not confined to Christianity. It occupies a central place in many religious traditions. For instance, if you study African traditional religions, omitting a course on healing, you would have to restart from the beginning. Similarly, in Islam, Islam's sacred reflects the divine emphasis on healing. Among the 99 names of Allah, we find intertwined meanings that refer to restoration and preservation. Al-Ba'ith, the resurrector. The raiser. The one who brings back from the dead. Mu'id, the restorer. And Al-Hafiz, the preserver, the protector.

So, such perspectives illuminate the universal and transformative nature of healing as a sacred and holistic endeavour across spiritual traditions. When Peter's mother-in-law was healed, she immediately began to serve them. Initially, I joked about the disciples apparent lack of knowledge about cooking imagining they may have urged Jesus to heal her so that they could have a meal. But beyond that, beyond the cultural nuances of the time, because only women could cook. We have to also focus on what happened in that woman's body.

She was able to carry out her daily activities. So, the heart of this story lies not in its humour of the disciples not being able to cook, but in the profound truth. Peter's mother-in-law needed healing before she could resume her normal life. This resonates deeply as we find ourselves

slowly emerging from times of the pandemic, the COVID pandemic. Do we need healing? We could ask ourselves that question. After four to five years of that pandemic, we may have gone on with our lives as if nothing happened.

But we know that many lives were broken. So, do we create space to reflect together on this cause, both visible and invisible, that this crisis has carved into our bodies, our minds and our communities? I recently attended a funeral of an 18-year-old, young Grenadian woman, who, committed suicide. She had embarked on an academic journey one year after she arrived in Canada. And she took away her life. What made me sad is how she lived in silence in her suffering in silence.

She did not have anybody to talk to. And many Christians are like that. They suffer in silence and they assume that suffering is part of our Christian life. This silence is what unsettles me most. In this post-pandemic world, how much space are we truly creating for individuals to voice their traumas? Are we too eager to transition back to normal simply because we all endured the pandemic together? Should we instead be asking what systems and support are necessary to uplift those who emerged from this global crisis weakened?

To have them not to just survive but to thrive. Much like Peter's mother-in-law, restored to health and service by the touch of Christ. Dear friends, let this year be a year of healing. May it be a season where our burdens are shared and met with opened hearts and listening ears. Let us also humbly acknowledge our own need for restoration, recognizing that seeking help is not a sign of weakness, but of wisdom. Only then can we truly rise and serve the people of God and live out and proclaim the Good News of our Lord.

Amen