



Wounded Healers: Bearers of Hope and Healing

BROTHER IGNATIUS PERKINS, OP, RN, PhD

“In our woundedness, we can become a source of life for others.” — Henri Nouwen, 1972

“After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I thirst.’ There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth.” — John 19: 28-29

In our reflection on Jesus’ thirst as he was dying, we are drawn to consider that his thirst is the result of the trauma of the pain of his scourging and the failure of the crowds to offer Jesus the nourishment of healing on his long journey to his crucifixion and death on Calvary. Yet, even in his suffering and death, he brought healing to the world. Jesus is a wounded healer to nurses and all health care personnel in this time of our journey through the coronavirus pandemic.

During these days, we are called to reach out to our colleagues as wounded healers in our midst, who are suffering in any way, to assure them that they are unique and precious in Jesus’ eyes, the very face of compassion and mercy. In our healing ministry to one another, we are often called to bear some of the burdens borne by our colleagues, as well as to those of our patients and their families, and to quench their thirsts. As clinicians, though imperfect and at times vulnerable, we are committed to do all in our power to restore our patients to health and never abandon them in their journey toward wholeness of life.

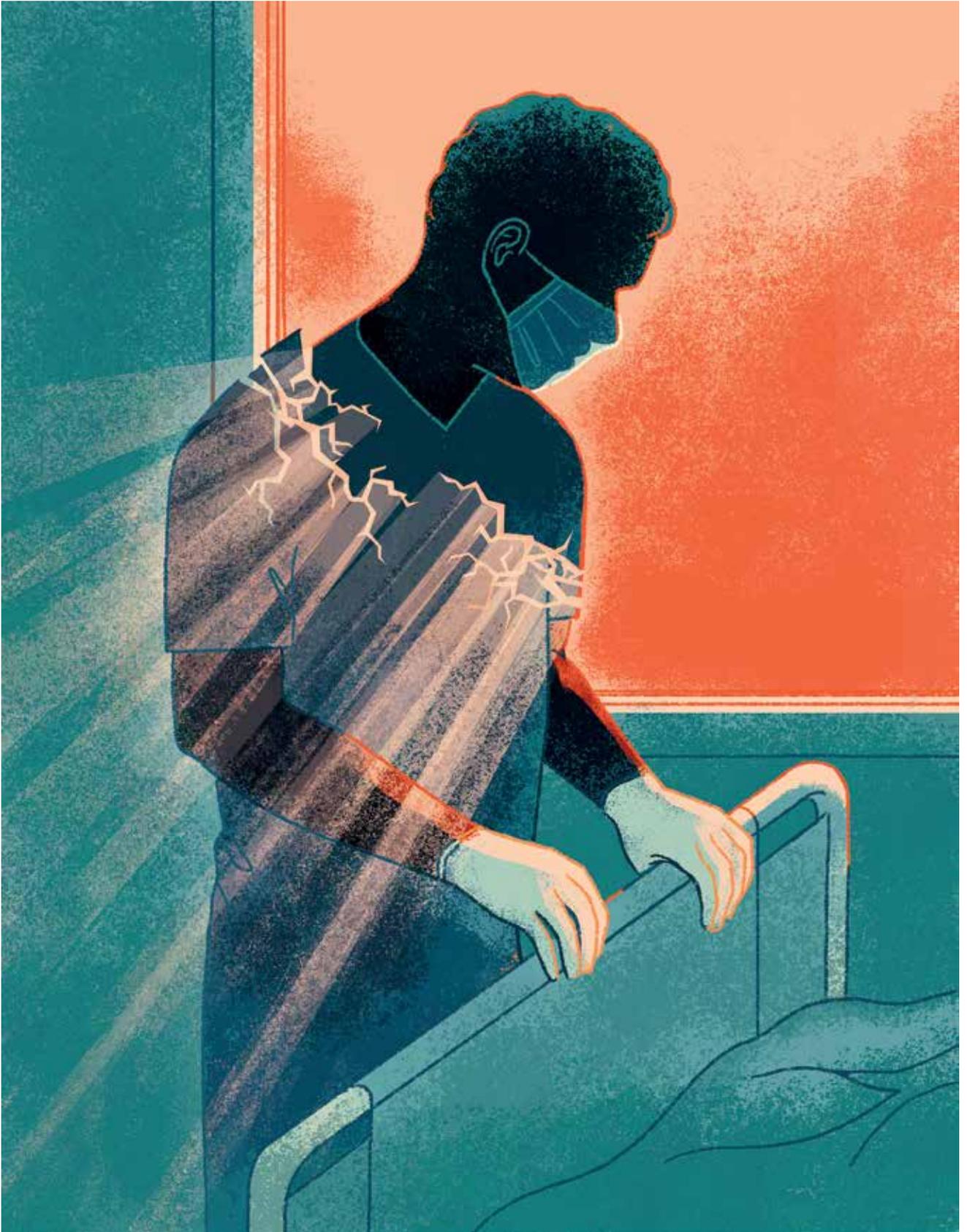
We are wounded healers: we enter into the lives of our patients, and too often we are alone with them, as they die from the coronavirus;

We are wounded healers: we accompany our colleagues in their care of the dying; sometimes we are called to accompany them in their own deaths;

We are wounded healers: we bear the stigma of the immeasurable pain of human suffering and dying as we stand before our patients, their families and our colleagues, filled with compassion, weeping, but, at times, with hands empty;

We are wounded healers: we experience a deep sense of abandonment, loneliness and failure because we are unable to rescue our patients and our colleagues from a disease not of their own making;

We are wounded healers: we find ourselves, at times, morally distressed because we are unable





to stop the dreadful decisions that must be made for patient care in the midst of this terrible disease;

We are wounded healers and bearers of hope and healing: each day as we say good-bye to our patients and colleagues we are afraid to return home to our families, knowing that we may carry

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illness and death to them; we are fearful about returning to our centers of care — the guilt of abandoning the sick when caring moments are desperately needed but sometimes beyond our reach;

We are wounded healers and bearers of hope and healing: we are calling for urgent help to be relieved of these terrible burdens so that our ineradicable covenant to care for the sick and one another with compassion, the very soul of our call to be healers, will be re-affirmed. We want to reclaim human dignity and bring peace, healing and hope to one another and to our world, especially those who are abandoned, unloved and unwanted in our midst.

In the midst of these convulsive experiences and in solidarity with one another and our colleagues, we call on schools of the health professions, organizations, associations and church groups to collaborate in:

- Forming listening sessions in order to share the wounds, the pain, multiples losses and anger we are experiencing and to reaffirm and implement the power of the trilogy of health care (human dignity, freedom and flourishing) among individuals and communities;

- Providing comprehensive professional resources (psychological, emotional, physical, pastoral, ethical, social work) for our colleagues to help them journey through their experiences of grieving, anxiety, depression, to support those who have lost hope and self-confidence, and

reclaim confidence as instruments of healing and hope;

- Implementing strategies that will reach out especially to those have become isolated, withdrawn, feel abandoned, and think they have little reason to hope;

- Establishing local and regional interdisciplinary networks that provide long-term counseling, special services and resources as we reclaim human dignity and freedom and promote human flourishing among all persons;

- Working with local and regional health care systems, our colleagues in the health professions, and civic leaders to construct a long-term plan for continuing care and rehabilitation;

As *wounded healers and bearers of hope and healing*, we bring to our world an elaborate and exhaustive array of experiences, competencies and a legion of unparalleled faith-filled experiences and expertise in the Catholic health care ministry, in education, administration, research across all domains of service to humanity. The profound virtuous act of the healer, the act that unites each of us, is embedded in the proclamation we all voiced when we dared to enter the world of health care.

This promise says: regardless of who you are, your gender, race, ethnicity, or religious persuasion, regardless of your illness or your life experiences; I am promising you my commitment that

Regardless of who you are, your gender, race, ethnicity, or religious persuasion, regardless of your illness or your life experiences; I am promising you my commitment that I will care for you.

I will care for you; I will try to heal your pain, to ameliorate your suffering, to help you accept the limitations posed by the ravages of your illness. I promise that I will accept your invitation to be with you when you are afraid, alone or dying; and to never abandon you along this journey.

As *wounded healers and bearers of hope and healing*, amid the threats of the coronavirus, we must never allow our promise be compromised. This is our vowed commitment to one another, to

our colleagues, to the sick entrusted to our care, and to our nation and beyond. Let us reclaim the power of our promise: let us help one another to be healed of this terrible threat to human dignity, freedom and human flourishing. In this journey together we will be freed to bring the promise of hope and healing to one another and to every person entrusted to our care.

Finally, we ask Jesus, our model of the wounded healer, to protect us in our journey of healing and hope:

- To bring strength, confidence and an enduring hope to each of us and to our colleagues, our patients and their loved ones;
- To take time to care for ourselves and to listen to the voices in our own hearts;
- To endow us with courage to remain faithful to the promise of healing;

- To care for our patients, their families and our colleagues with compassion;

- To bring healing to the sick, peace and comfort to the dying and their families;

- To bring wisdom, compassion and confidence to our leaders;

- To grant eternal rest to the dead; and

- To comfort the mourners. Amen.

As *wounded healers and bearers of hope and healing*, how successful we are in bringing healing to each of us as wounded healers will determine how successful we are in fulfilling our promise to bring healing and hope to all persons entrusted to our care and to a suffering world.

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