Wholistic care (1583 words)

Veterans Administration hospitals are concerned with providing their patients with wholistic care. That means the staff looks at a person's body, mind, and spirit when giving care. These three are interrelated in our lives. When we are sick in the body, it impacts our mind. For example, when we have a headache, it impacts how we relate to other people. On the other hand, when people are negatively aggressive towards us, we literally get a pain in the neck. That is why looking at the mind-body relationship in good medical care is crucial in diagnosing what is wrong.

We get upset when we go to the doctor, and he only treats the physical, and we are not better. But too often, medical doctors look at just the physical elements involved and assign a pill regime to deal with the symptoms. That is why, in many hospitals, you come into the emergency room with one problem. While they are treating that one problem, they find a secondary problem, but you have to leave and come back for that treatment because it's not what you came in for initially.

Currently, I am involved in the training of physicians during their residency. I talked to them about looking at the whole person. For example, a religious person usually takes better care of their bodies because their religious practice and beliefs demand it. After all, for most, it is the temple of God. I also talked to them about praying with their patients. One doctor said that in her patient intake, she looks towards signs that they are religious and what traditions they follow. If she sees a person wearing a crucifix before a procedure and taking that off because of the procedure, it may make them feel less protected by the divine, so the doctor offers to pray with them. This gives them great comfort to know that their doctor is a believer who cares enough to look at the whole person. Very few people have ever figured out that she was a Hindu because she prays with fervor with Jews and Christians.

Our church is also wholistic in providing spiritual care for us. On the physical side, we have multiple occasions on which we make the sign of the cross. In doing so, our mind is reminded of the Trinity and the offering of Christ on the cross. We do many poklonay especially during the Great Fast. This activity is challenging for many, yet they still attempt it. It is a reminder of the lowering ourselves to God. We also take mini pilgrimages around the church during the Great and Holy Week. We are reminded of Jesus's journey to the cross and his resurrection from the tomb. And then there are the calisthenics of standing, bowing, and possibly kneeling during the liturgy. Psychologists tell us that if we do a physical event often enough, it impacts our mind, just like the simple act of pushing ourselves away from the table often enough is a good diet program. If we just sat during the Divine Liturgy, we would focus much of our mental energy on how uncomfortable we are sitting. That's why the churches in Ukraine used to have sitting places for the ill and the elderly. Just like the priest stands during the entire liturgy, the people used to stand during the entire liturgy, yet both groups had the opportunity to take short walks. This is especially true for young children. They can go up front and watch things happening, especially those things that happen behind closed doors. They can walk around with their friends and see all the icons and the mysterious people portrayed. They can walk around and see their relatives and family, which is everyone's blessing. Standing reminds us that we are in the presence of the divine, and those short walks were walking with God as Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden.

In terms of our mental health, we have been educated by the Lord himself in the proclamation of the gospel and the words of the priest that take those passages from the mind to the heart. Sometimes, the church expresses poetically its teachings. For example, in the First Sunday antiphon, we have the words “shout to the Lord all the earth, sing now to his name give glory to his praise. Through the prayers of the Mother of God, O savior, save us.” We are reminded at the beginning that the reason we are here is to give praise to God. This praise should not be done quietly and in whispers but shouted through all the earth. It has been said that Saint Augustine said when one sings one prays twice. So, our songs, and our prayers express our faith. So, the prayers of the Mother of God ask her to pray for our salvation. Savior, save us. We are reminded that Jesus Christ is our savior, and his mother can pray for us. She cannot grant us favors, but she can ask her son for those favors. We are reminded in the liturgy of the role of the Virgin Mary. “It is truly right to bless you, O God-bearing One, as the ever-blessed and immaculate Mother of our God. More honorable than the cherubim and by far more glorious than the seraphim; ever a virgin, you gave birth to the God the Word, O true Mother of God, we magnify you!” There is so much theology in a simple song. We bless Mary, which means we honor her. We do not worship her. We bless her. She is the one who bore God in her womb and is ever blessed. She was conceived without sin, so she remained immaculate; she is higher than the angels, more honorable, and more glorious than the angels because she gave birth to God's word. She did not give birth to Jesus, the man who then became God, where from her womb was born Jesus, both God and man.

Another educational moment is when we say the creed. The church created the creed as a way for the faithful to test what somebody would tell them. If it disagrees with the creed, it is not our faith. This creed was not the creation of the government and not created at one session of council. The council of Nicea created the draft of the creed. It was then sent through the church by the bishops to ensure it was the church's faith. At the Council of Constantinople in 381, this creed was finalized and presented to the church. An interesting legend is found concerning this creed. After Nicea, the legend goes there were two creeds, both very similar but different. When they came together in Constantinople, the creeds were placed in the grave of a local saint, and they were placed in the saint's hands. When the council was to begin, the grave was opened, and one creed was found in the saint's hands and the others at the feet.

Lastly, the divine liturgy touches our spirit. Our spirit has been raised by singing. The prayers give us hope based on God's love for us. But there is no more glorious and holy moment than the reception of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. This author cannot think of any prayer that should speak from our hearts and minds as the prayer before the reception of communion. We express our belief and confess, meaning that we bring our belief into the world that Christ is the son of the living God who came into the world to save sinners, whom I am the first. We ask God to accept us at his mystical supper. The Divine Liturgy is not an event in time but joins us to the Last Supper and the crucifixion and the Liturgy in heaven, and so we ask in the words of the good thief to be remembered. For our mental health, we ask not to be judged but to be healed because we realize honestly we are sinners. We have sinned so much that they can't be counted. Yet Jesus and the Eucharist can remove all of our sins.

Our services are wholistic in another way. It combines a myriad of reasons for gathering before God. Protestantism has been divided into many denominations and many different forms of worship. One form is called praise and worship. It combines music and the word. Our liturgies are traditionally sung, so that would be the praise in prayer and then responsive psalmody. We have the worship and the word. Some call their services the holy Eucharist. The word Eucharist means Thanksgiving, and it connotes the reception of communion. After we have received communion, we say, “We have seen the true light. We have received the heavenly Spirit. We have found the true faith. We worship the undivided Trinity for having saved us.” Acknowledging what God has given us is a way of expressing gratitude. In the Quaker tradition, the service consists predominantly of silence until someone is moved to speak. In our tradition, there are times of silence in our prayer life, even in the divine liturgy. This is an opportunity for the spirit to move within us.

The Divine Liturgy, as celebrated in our church, is for healing the body, mind, and spirit. It also brings all the best forms of worship together in one place. The Divine Liturgy is truly wholistic.