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## "Ouch"

Fr. Randy Roche

*Loyola Marymount University*

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“Ouch”

We know what it is like to have received a bruising bump on our heads or a small bleeding cut to one of our fingers. We might not have said “ouch,” but whether we gave voice to it or not, we suffered a slight injury, and it hurt. Likewise, at any time, a thought can come to us that is equivalently a bump or a cut, and which hurts, though in a somewhat different way than with physical pain. However, the analogy with bumps and cuts can be useful for proper and swift healing.

For a bruise, we might quickly apply a cold pack to reduce swelling, and for a cut that bleeds, cleaning and an appropriately sized bandage. For interior hurts, such as internal thoughts that are harsh, negative or disparaging, we might ignore the pain and take no healing measures. After all, no one will see the “bruise,” and no blood is spilled, since it is all inside us. But, interior hurts that are not treated relatively close to the time of the injury are quite liable to equivalently swell or become infected, and cause us further pain and inconvenience.

Most of our physical bumps and cuts are the results of accidents. We might say that “we did it to ourselves,” but of course we did not set out to hurt ourselves, and assigning blame is a distraction to the necessity of getting on with the healing process. Some of the hurtful, angry, hateful thoughts and words that appear in our minds are also accidents, in that we do not initiate them. But because they are within us, we could think that we are somehow the cause, and that something is wrong with us. Worse, we might even believe that healing is therefore not possible. Following the analogy with physical hurts, our responsibility is to turn our attention to appropriately treating the interior injuries, and not to deny their existence or to ignore their effects upon us.

The cold-packs, cleaning and bandaging of interior injuries is accomplished first by deciding to treat them sooner rather than later. We might have to wait until later in the day, even to the evening, but delaying more than that will likely lead to further negative consequences. While we can reason with ourselves about the relative unimportance of being harried or disturbed by negative thoughts, healing depends upon identifying what has taken place and what we will do about it. Telling someone that a cut on his or her finger is “nothing” does not make it disappear, while helping apply a bandage does indeed begin the healing process physically and emotionally. We do not want to make more of our interior hurts than they merit, but we do well to consider the kind and quality of whatever has caused pain, and decide whether or if we need to do something more than accepting that the thoughts were injurious.

By reflecting on our experiences with thoughts that tend towards discouragement, unreasoned fear or unfocused anger, we might recognize them for what they are: negative and counter-productive. This is our chance, in naming them as inimical to our well-being, when we can, with reason and grace on our side, stop them, think opposite them, and pray for healing.

“Ouch” as word or a feeling is a helpful symptom letting us know that we are in need of healing rather than passive acceptance.