

Wash yourselves clean! Cease doing evil; learn to do good.

Isaiah 1:16

The child had been running full-tilt across the gravel road when he tripped over a broken branch. The scrapes to his face and hands, while not serious, were painful and ugly. Rescued from the tumble by his consoling mother, he lay whimpering now as she ministered to him. Painstakingly, she lifted every cinder from his precious face, flesh of her own flesh. She blessed each cleansing wipe with a kiss and hummed over it the lullaby of healing. Still he resisted her ministrations. “Mommy, that hurts! Mommy, stop!” We can almost hear her encouraging him to be brave.

In this second week of Lent, the prophet Isaiah exhorts us to have courage. Our wounds are filled with the cinders of unforgiven hurts and unrepented sins. There is much in our personal lives that festers. On a broader scale, we unwittingly collude with a world that stifles life for the most vulnerable. Somewhere in our running toward fulfillment, we have tripped over the unexpected branches of our own selfishness, addictions or neglect.

Isaiah’s God is clear and straightforward: “Cease doing evil; learn to do good.” It’s like the advice we hear from our doctor at our annual physical. “Stop smoking. Curb the salt. Exercise. Get proper rest.” How often are these simple, rational encouragements ignored?

This week, the Divine Healer “talks turkey” with us. There are steps we must take if we expect to be reconciled with our true selves and with God. Can we ask God to help us lift the cinders from our hearts?