

## **Priest heals through power of touch**

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MANILA, Philippines -- He is simple and unassuming. In fact, nothing in his demeanor says his very hands have healed thousands of people worldwide.

For Fr. Fernando Suarez, his ministry is not complicated. He is simply a vessel of God's healing power longing to reach out to people and remind them that He is always present. "The bottom line is this healing is turning people back to God. The healing that I do and the healing that people feel is just what happens on the external. What really happens is spiritual healing," Suarez said.

At a time when people's faith is shaken by deaths, calamities and tragedies, the need for healing is universal, according to Suarez.

The healing, however, does not need to be a spectacular event to be believed. God's ways and miracles, much like Jesus' own ministry in the Bible, are simply the touching of people's lives, the priest explained.

Suarez's gift of healing, as many of his followers and supporters would attest, comes through the power of touch. He simply prays with those seeking healing and touches him or her, in the process extending God's healing hand.

"The gift of touch, that's what he (Suarez) has. It's Jesus in the Eucharist that heals for him. This is an extension of Jesus' healing ministry. We are called to be like Jesus in the world today and, in a sense, this is ministry-healing," said Fr. Jeff Shannon, who like Suarez belongs to the same order, the Companions of the Cross.

Shannon now accompanies Suarez in his healing ministry all over the world.

The husband of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Jose Miguel, was one of those healed by Suarez in his celebrated "miraculous" recovery this year.

Deedee Siytangco, a spokesperson for former President Corazon Aquino and now one of those in the core group organizing Suarez's healing Masses and sessions in the country, relates that Ms Arroyo had called for Suarez to say Mass for her husband during Holy Week.

The President's husband was scheduled to undergo a crucial operation that day, and so Suarez asked those attending the Mass to make only one petition -- for the successful operation of Arroyo.

Before the operation, Siytangco said, Ms Arroyo was told by the doctors that one of the problems they were having was finding the vein that was crucial to the success of her husband's heart operation.

Five minutes after the Mass, the surgeons were able to find the crucial vein which led to the successful open heart surgery and almost miraculous recovery of the President's husband.

Before that, however, Suarez had held meetings with the President's family and said Masses for the health of her husband.

"He had already prayed over him earlier during that Holy Week when the (President's husband) complained of his heart. He touched his heart already," said Siytangco.

### **Overflow of Mass**

Suarez's healing is always done after Mass. Shannon explained that Suarez believes that it is Jesus in the Eucharist who heals people through him. The healing grace therefore happens as an overflow of the Mass.

"This way all the focus is not on him [Suarez] but it's all on God, all on Jesus," Shannon said.

Suarez celebrated Mass on Saturday in a chapel at the Wellness Center in the Meralco Compound on Ortigas Avenue in Pasig City. It was offered following a retreat of a religious women's organization, Martha's Vineyard.

The place was overflowing with people and yet was very solemn.

Everyone was quietly and peacefully reflecting and listening to the choir. And perhaps also silently praying for their own healing -- for whatever sickness and hurts they had.

### **Catchers**

After Mass, Shannon asked those who came to seek the healing touch of Suarez to line up across the altar while "catchers" stood behind to assist those who would "rest in the spirit" during the healing process.

Small mattresses were also prepared to cushion falls.

The "resting in the spirit" is when those healed fall, as if in a fainting spell -- a scenario often seen in similar healing sessions.

The fall is called "resting in the spirit" because it is at this point that people experience and feel the conversion brought about by God's healing grace, according to Shannon.

### **Healed on the spot**

Zenaida Mendoza, one of those who lined up, was touched by Suarez, and “rested in the spirit.” She was healed on the spot, she claimed.

“It was all warm in my body. It was all of a sudden moving toward my body and I had to fall,” she said, describing her experience of “resting in the spirit.”

Mendoza had been suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome for about 17 years and she had to stop working in 1991 and eventually wear a hand brace.

“It hurt so much I couldn’t even write,” she said.

But after being touched by Suarez, she said, all the numbness in her hands vanished and, slowly, she was able to move her hands again.

### **Amazing**

“To be healed, it’s amazing and I claim it. It is with me and I pray I have it for the rest of my life,” said Mendoza, all the while crying and demonstrating how freely she could now use her hands.

The healing process may, of course, happen differently with different people. Shannon explained that most of the time, the healing happened on the spot. He said as soon as Suarez prayed with the person and touched him or her, the person experienced something.

### **Delayed for some**

For some people, however, it is delayed, he said. People get a little grace after Suarez’s healing session and then the actual healing happens through the night, or the next day, or the next week.

For example, Federico Galang, one of those who attended Mass that day, earlier asked Suarez to pray for his son, Federico Galang III, who has been diagnosed with cancer of the colon two months ago. The young Federico, one of the attendees at the Mass that day, was cleared of his cancer.

Before the operation, the elder Galang said his son’s condition was so bad that the doctors were preparing to cut through his son’s stomach and attach a bag outside to collect digestive waste.

“But after Father Suarez prayed for him, that never happened. They [the doctors] were able to connect to the rectum. The surgery was successful. He’s better now. We have a lot of faith in God and that is what healed him,” said Galang.

And a lot of the healing happens with faith in God’s healing hand.

**Tears of joy**

Another cancer patient, Rosario S. de la Cruz, was one of those who lined up the altar that day to be healed by Suarez. She was diagnosed with Stage 4 ovarian cancer in March and the tumor had metastasized to her lungs. She has been undergoing chemotherapy since.

She was in high spirits after the healing session, sharing -- with tears of joy -- that Suarez had told her after their prayer together not to worry anymore about her cancer.

“He told me not to be afraid anymore because I’m healed,” said De la Cruz, adding that Suarez’s assuring words that day had given her a lot of hope.

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