

The Pilgrim Soul  
Episode: Healing Wounds  
April 1 2025

**Sofia**

Welcome back to The Pilgrim's Soul, a podcast about the journey of faith in the world of today. I'm your host, Sofia.

**Giuliana**

And I'm Giuliana.

**Adrianna**

And I'm Adrianna.

**Sofia**

And today we have the great joy of welcoming Bishop Erik Varden to the podcast. Bishop Varden is a monk and bishop in Norway, who spent 10 years at the University of Cambridge, my proud alma mater, where he entered the Catholic Church.

In 2002, he joined Mount St. Bernard Abbey in England, eventually becoming abbot. And Pope Francis named him the Bishop of Trondheim in 2019. In addition to a wonderful and very active blog, he's published a number of books, the latest of which, Healing Wounds, is the subject of our conversation today. Bishop Varden, thank you so much for joining us.

**Bishop Varden**

Thank you very much for having me. It's a pleasure.

**Giuliana**

So for those of our listeners, many of them have joined us in reading your book this Lent, but for those who haven't, to give a brief overview, the book follows a really beautiful and powerful medieval poem by a fellow Cistercian monk as he gazes at the wounds of the crucified Christ, and your book explores this poem through the lens of Christian tradition, scripture, history, art, and your own experience, to develop the thesis that Christ's wounds heal us, heal our own wounds, and even allow them to flourish.

So can you start by telling us a little bit about what inspired you to explore this topic at this time? Why is this a message we need to hear now?

**Bishop Varden**

Well, I think something I've been interested in for a long time is the way in which the perception of Christ, within the church and Christian environments, changes through time.

It's a sort of an undulating movement, that there are periods that tend to focus particularly on one aspect of Christology, other periods focus on another aspect of Christology. And, as I point out in the book, the image which for us is the great emblem of the Christian faith, the image of Christ on the cross, actually comes into Christian consciousness fairly late, only in the 5th century. And then it becomes, I mean, it assumes center stage, and we find—not least in the Middle Ages, and the poem that structures the book, as you said, *Giuliana*, is from that period—but we find it also in art.

The Crucified is at the center of Christian consciousness. I would say, and this is a personal hunch of mine, that that is much less the case now. I think we have much more of a tendency now to think of Christ the teacher, Christ the friend, Christ the brother, and all those things are true and good, but it's only in the light of Christ crucified. Anyone who reads the Pauline letters with any degree of perseverance will find that message repeated time and time again, that it's only in the light of the cross that all the other things make sense. And so I think it is good and healthy at such a time as ours to focus again on this central image.

And I think it's also important because we are a little bit fixated with wounds, I think, in our cultural climate now. And I intend cultural climate then in a very global sense, not only within a Christian sphere of reference. And so I think it's good to reflect on what the Christian faith and what the example of Christ and the saving work of Christ tells us about woundedness and the possibility of healing.

### **Adrianna**

Thanks, Bishop Varden. I was really moved how you began the book with a historical outline of how Christians have related to the cross, beginning with this perhaps implicit denial because it's lacking in any artistic depiction other than via irony, and now where we tend to idealize our wounds or even remain numb to the cross.

What do you see is at stake in our inability to see the cross for what it is? And what do you think can pierce through that blindness?

### **Bishop Varden**

Well, I think, and again, I speak very personally here, just as sharing a hunch, but I think we have a lot of trouble now relating to God as our Redeemer, because basically, we don't really think that we need to be redeemed. And there are many reasons for that.

We live in a time where we have so many means by which to fix ourselves and we're constantly faced, through advertising and through all sorts of means, we're faced with the signal is being transmitted to us: “you can sort yourself out, you can fix yourself, download this thing from the

internet, or watch this self help course, or try this diet, or go and see this life coach, or whatever it is, and you will turn into the best edition of yourself.”

And we all like the idea of that, you know, because it's nice to think that I'm perfectible, and that I'm perfectible by means that are at my disposal—as long as there's a bit of cash behind my credit card. So I think it is really important if we want to be sort of halfway serious about the way we read scripture and the way we participate in the sacraments to reflect again on what it actually means to need to be saved. On what it means to believe in a God who does actually save us, and who does this entirely unheard of and really quite shocking thing—which is to compromise His own absolute transcendence and step into our reality, not just as a passing visitor but in order to take up residence there and to remain close to us while remaining at the same time the absolute mover of the stars and creator of all things and the sustainer of being.

So I think that's basically what's at stake.

### **Sofia**

Thank you. I think that's an incisive summary of where we stand as a culture and toward that end—of discovering this incomprehensible paradox of God Himself present, dwelling among us, pitching His tent among us to redeem us—I was very struck by the image that you explore in some detail of John resting on the chest of Christ and listening to the heartbeat of God, and thereby preparing to share in the tragedy of the world that Christ has, has taken upon himself and into himself. And you state in the book that this is the invitation to all of us. So for those of us who are living and working in the world, how primarily does that unfold? What are the sorts of relationships and gestures and experiences that help us listen to the heartbeat of God?

### **Bishop Varden**

You know, a theme that you find again and again in the writers of the early church, who are very keen to safeguard and uphold the exaltedness of God, they will stress that God in His majesty has one, and I use this word advisedly, has one irredeemable weak point, which is his philanthropy, which is his love for humankind.

It's like a wound in the heart of God. I think that in order to get some sense of what that means, we need to foster and to hone and to purify our own capacity for compassion. Compassion not just as sentiment, not just as a response by which, you know, I hear some terrible thing on the news and I think, “Oh, isn't that absolutely awful.” And I may, I may feel a real sting in my heart before I go off and make pancakes.

But that shock and scandal of human suffering, and the shock and scandal as well of human iniquity, of going some way towards experiencing that woundedness of God's heart as a wound in my heart. And that is precisely a theme in this poem by the Cistercian abbot Arnulf that I based the book on, isn't it?

It's a theme that we find repeated in so much Christian art and devotional texts and devotional prayers, that of entering into Christ's heart. We need to remind ourselves that that it's actually quite a risky proposition that because we propose to enter into Christ's heart, not just to be kept cozily warm but in order to live within the vulnerability of that heart. And we know how sensitive a human heart can be, but the extent to which God's heart is vulnerable, is entirely beyond our comprehension. And it's only by focusing our gaze on the contemplation of Christ's cross that we get some idea of what that might mean.

**Adrianna**

Thank you, Bishop Varden, that brought up a memory for me as a child before my father, where he told me once I had hurt his feelings when I asked him and he picked me up from softball practice and I asked him not to get down on his knees for a hug because I was embarrassed and He told me at home that it had hurt his feelings. He grew up without a father. And I was so struck by the occasion, it's so etched into my memory because it had never occurred to me that I could hurt my father's feelings. It's a weak analogy before the eternal father, but...

**Bishop Varden**

No, but it's a real one.

**Adrianna**

Yeah, an early one of development in me, of compassion.

**Bishop Varden**

There's that powerful image in the gospel of the woman in the flow of blood, who comes wanting to remain anonymous, and sort of sidling up to Jesus in a crowd, and touching his garment—hoping for the magic cure, and she is in fact cured, and what she hopes is that no one will notice.

And how would you notice that someone in a crowd touches your garment? And yet the evangelist tells us that Christ was instantly aware of power going out of him, and He turns around and, “What was that? Who was that?” And that reminds us that when we turn to God, we turn not only towards a great power, but we turn to a person who is personally present in all his relationships, in all his actions, in all his interventions. And that opens up that possibility that we can actually hurt our Father's heart, incarnate, embodied in Christ. And it's, as you say, we can so easily take it for granted that here is someone who is so much stronger than I, and responsible—thinking about the parental analogy now—you know, the way we perceive our parents when we're little, here is someone who's got everything sorted out.

How could anything I do have an impact on them? I mean, do they have an impact on me? That's fine. There's no trouble about that. But then, part of beginning to grow up is precisely to realize that, oh, there's no relationship which isn't a mutual relationship. And that awakens us to a very,

very beautiful dimension of being in relationship with somebody. But it also awakens us to responsibility.

### **Giuliana**

It seems to me like the primary way that I experience Christ's tenderness and the wound in His heart for humanity, as you were speaking about, is in the liturgy and in particular in His desire to be so close to me that He is present in the Eucharist and He allows himself to be put in our hands and on our tongue and to be made so vulnerable and so at the mercy of humanity in that way.

And yet, even in saying that, I know that my awareness of this reality is often limited and my experience of the liturgy as laying on the chest of Christ is not automatic. But it takes work because I become forgetful or indifferent or hardened. And so, how do you think we can deepen our understanding of the liturgy in this way and in so doing say yes to Christ's invitation to intimacy?

### **Bishop Varden**

I think I've been doing exactly what you're doing, really. Participate in it wholly, wholeheartedly, and reflectively, being intellectually conscious of what we're doing, studying the text, studying the gestures, performing the gestures. That's something I become more aware of with each year that passes actually: the importance of doing those things well, when we make the sign of the cross, or when we make an inclination, or a genuflection, or when we receive the sacraments at communion, or in confession, or if we receive the sacrament of the sick. To be really conscious in our gestures, to be conscious in our receptivity, and aware of the fact that all sacramental reality is a function of presence.

All liturgy is a function of presence, and a real participation in a real community. You know, at the end of the preface before the Sanctus in each Mass, the Sanctus always has a little explanatory bit in the middle which articulates some particular mystery of faith, of the season we're in or the feast we're celebrating. And then there is that sort of roll call at the end that says, now, in union with the angels and archangels, the seraphim and blessed cherubim, etc. And we can get so used to hearing that, that we think, "Oh yeah, but aren't we going to start singing the Sanctus soon?" But it's good to be very aware of that, and conscious that we are, by virtue of our liturgical participation, members of—in the strong sense, you know—members of a body that surrounds us in the congregation, but also exceeds us in the Church of eternity.

So I think (to use a word which is bandied about quite a bit now and has come to mean all sorts of things that I might not think of it as meaning, but nevertheless, it's a useful word) to be more mindful of precisely what we're doing and what is going on at that moment and constantly to recall ourselves to the fact that this is real.

### **Sofia**

Thank you. Yes, I think that's a profoundly educative practice, precisely by keeping our bodies involved in the pursuits of the spirit in this way, and really being, Giussani used to emphatically insist that the most important thing in order to live religiously is simply to live the present moment, intensely in all of its factors, to be really aware of what's in front of you and what you're doing, and I think liturgy is the privileged place to practice that and see the implications of that.

And I find that when I'm given the grace to be aware of what I'm doing, when I enter into liturgy, especially when it comes to this aspect of contemplation of Christ's wounded body in the midst of it, it's an unfailing reminder that what my heart is thirsting for is an ecclesial reality, a communal salvation, rather than just something that comes to me as an individual.

I'm helped in the fact that often, when I go to Mass, I want to keep in mind a particular loved one who's not next to me or have been recently asking for the intercession of a particular saint. And it's almost through that particular person, once again, this mystery of the whole Church is made known to me in my being in the liturgy. And I find this very salutary because I tend to radical individualism...

**Bishop Varden**

Don't we all!

**Sofia**

Perhaps all of us, I think, perhaps more than others. And I've been challenged by your own Episcopal motto, which translates from the Latin to "Face to face with my brethren I've come to understand." I was wondering how have relationships and encounters with your brethren helped you to understand the truths that you write about in this text about Christ's healing wounds?

And in particular, the fact that we're not just brought into Christ's wounds, but meant to, as we enter into them, remember there and in a sense bring with us all those who have been entrusted to us, that it's a communal movement that we're called to.

**Bishop Varden**

Yes, absolutely. I've been immensely helped by the example of my brethren. I use that word in the largest possible sense, but also, I mean in a very particular sense by my brethren in the monastery, because one of the things about belonging to a monastic community is that you're part of a very imperfect group of human beings to whose collective imperfection, you know, I've contributed greatly.

But you're part of this group of people who have committed themselves to an extremely radical undertaking. And sometimes, the monastic life is in many ways a very ordinary life. It says in the constitutions of my order, the order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, that our life is obscure, laborious and ordinary.

And that's very true most of the time. And you know, we, like other people, have toilets to clean and meals to cook and gardens to tend and cows to sort out and guests to receive and all that sort of thing. And that's part of embodied human existence. And yet, we do try to invest all of those very ordinary pursuits with a supernatural purpose.

And it's awe inspiring, really, to see that, day after day, month after month, year after year in other people. And to see their fidelity to that purpose and to see how it affects and changes and perhaps even transforms them over time. And that gives one hope not to give up one's own struggle, such as it is.

The early Cistercian Fathers were very fond of the wisdom literature of the Bible. They used the Book of Wisdom and the Book of Sirach, Ecclesiasticus, particularly for formation of newcomers. And there are certain citations from those books recur fairly regularly in their writings. And one of them is a verse that I like very much, which goes like this, "Woe to him who is alone, for when he falls he has no one to pick him up."

And they saw in that a statement of what the Church is, of what the community is. And it's a signpost that indicates the collective charity, benevolence, that must define any Christian community. But it also indicates that great mystery of seeing the raising up—that is such a powerful scriptural motif—actually realized in case studies that surround you.

And even in your own experience.

### **Adrianna**

I'm really moved by what you're saying, Bishop Varden, and even just this reflection you've given of your ordinary time at the monastery and how many of us experience that. I think I experienced some of that in domestic life, not the cows, but many don't. So many people work in the technological ages, sit at their computer all day and then they're at their phone and maybe the only human interaction they have is over Zoom like us now.

And I'm thinking of the New York Encounter, which was recently held, of this beautiful conversation called the Fragment of Being. And one of the speakers, Christine Rosen, said that she thinks more than an epidemic of loneliness, which has been talked about a lot, that we're in an epidemic of self-isolation.

And so much of your book is this demonstration of embodiment. I mean, the poem is gazing upon the crucified Christ and his body in this very intense way and it's slow. And I think one aspect, a consequence of really meditating on the poem is to meditate again upon our own bodies. But I'm wondering also if you have other thoughts about how we can relearn our bodies and the bodies of others as a place of encounter with God, and then what role you think physical touch has in that. The book focuses so much on contemplation of Christ, but I was wondering if you had thoughts on physical touch too.

### **Adrianna**

Well, you touch on interesting things there. I think one really important thing is to opt out of self-isolation and to actually intentionally seek the company of embodied others and just not to put up with all the mechanisms that are constantly being engendered to further our self-isolation.

I'll give you a silly example, but I think of it often and it was very helpful to me. Last year, I was out doing my shopping here in town in Trondheim, and I was at the supermarket, where there are now almost only auto checkout tills. So I was standing there, scanning the stuff in my basket, and trying to weigh some fruit I'd bought.

But there was something wrong with the scales, or there was moisture on the screen or whatever. I couldn't get it to work. And next to me stood a woman who was a bit older than me, quite a lot older than me and trying to do the same thing. And she was also trying to weigh bananas and it didn't work.

And at one point she turned to me and she said—people are very plain spoken up here where I live—and she said to me, “Oh, it won't be long now and we'll have to perform our own surgery.” And it was just such a true statement. I think we should say no to those things and seek out, and go to the till where there is actually someone sitting and say hello to them, to greet people we meet, not to shun eye contact, to practice courtesy and attention going around.

And I find often enough that, just going about one's task—doing errands, going shopping, going to the post office, if you're fortunate enough to live in a place where there is a post office—those little ordinary encounters can actually be so joyful.

And I think we can, we should really make positive efforts to reinstate them. And I think one of the reasons, sociologically speaking, a parish or religious community or an ecclesial movement can be so important is that they do provide meeting places and to uphold that. So I think that that's the first thing I would say, you know, intentionally foster real encounters between embodied people.

And what you say about touch, I think is also important. Obviously we're cautious about touch and we're rightly cautious. We're conscious about the ambivalence of quite a lot of touching. We're conscious that touch can be used as a means of manipulation or humiliation. And so, it's good that we have those things present in our minds, but at the same time, I think there, too, we must be aware of not going too far.

And I think it's good to foster chaste expressions of touch. For example, a sort of thing that hardly anyone does anymore, but which I think is a profoundly meaningful thing, is to shake hands with people. You meet somebody and you extend your hand. A handshake can be an entirely chaste, formal way of enacting a meeting, of saying that, “Fancy that, here am I and here are you, and we're close enough to actually touch one another.”

That sort of very simple thing, I think, is worth enacting. Then obviously, there is the complex and fascinating and beautiful and vulnerable dimension of intimate touch and intimate



relationships. There too, in ways appropriate to and correspondent with one's state of life, each person has got to reflect responsibly on how touch can be a way of expressing affection and respect—and to beware of tendencies to use touch as a means simply of self-affirmation or of stilling one's own hunger.

Simply asking that question is really, really helpful and, and talking about it is helpful.

### **Giuliana**

Thank you. What you say about intentionally seeking out encounters with other people and about physical touch reminds me of the lessons that we all learned from the COVID pandemic—when those moments became so sacred, almost, those little moments of human interaction that we had in an everyday life.

And as intensely as we lived those years, or that year, however long it was where we lived, only a few years later, already, I'm forgetting the importance of the other. Because I'm equal parts shy and self-centered, and I would rather go to the automatic checkout, honestly. And one thing that really helps me is that I'm a mother of three, and having children with me, I find that children bring out the humanity of the person in front of me: kind gestures and smiles and stories about that person. And it allows me to see the tenderness of the other person, and also seeing through my children's eyes. I mean, when we go out on a walk in the neighborhood they're saying hi to everybody and waving to everybody and asking the postman to honk his horn. I'm almost embarrassed; my reaction is almost embarrassment for their enthusiasm at the person in front of them. How I hate that reaction in myself! So I think for me that's something that's been really helpful—to see other people. I think living in community and among people that are in different stages of life or different states of life than us, it has something to bear on this reflection on embodiment.

### **Bishop Varden**

Blessed are you who have children like that, who ask the postman to honk his horn.

And it's good and important for all of us, the clergy not least, to have those humanizing encounters. I had a wonderful experience not so long ago. I was standing after Mass, talking to somebody, and then a little girl who comes to Mass here came up to me and said, “Bishop Erik, can you tie my shoelace?”

### **Sofia**

That's beautiful. And children do have a disarming way, I think, of breaking us out of the mix of shyness and routine and self-absorption that Giuli was describing. And that reminds me of, toward the end of your book, you write about how through the healing of the cross, we are broken out of a prison of self-centeredness. And our wounds, instead of being at the mercy of them, they become vehicles of mercy—which I thought was a beautiful and true turn of phrase. I found it profoundly hopeful that you described this as taking place with the wounds remaining

open, whether I'm thinking about the wounds of the church or some of the more profound wounds of my own personal history, but even almost more so the daily wounds of my restless unfulfilled desire for something more, and something deeper.

So what does it mean that these wounds as well can be something that become a vehicle of mercy for others through this work of welcoming the wounded Christ into my heart?

### **Bishop Varden**

Well, I think, you know, any experience of trauma—and you know, the word trauma literally means a wound—so any wounding experience will have its traumatic effect. And there will be pain to negotiate, and fear perhaps, and humiliation, and all those things. And that is work that needs to be done. But any traumatic experience has the possibility of, precisely to come back to a theme we talked about earlier on, of deepening my compassion.

Because, let's not forget that compassion means a suffering with, and it is insofar as I have the experience of what it is to be in pain in whatever way, in what it is to sustain this particular wound, that hopefully the penny will drop: “Ah, I'm not the only person in the universe who is actually wounded.”

And the person next to me may even visibly or recognizably be wounded in a way. And I think, “Well, if this thing that I'm carrying is hurting me like this, I wonder what sort of hurt he or she experiences.” And then that can contribute to what St. Benedict wonderfully describes towards the end of the Prologue as ‘the widening of the heart.’

That my little peanut heart suddenly starts growing as it becomes more and more able to assume into itself the reality of other lives and thereby starts growing, step by little step, towards the dimensions of God's heart, which is a heart without any limitations at all.

So I think it's really important—because we all know how being in pain can make us shut ourselves into ourselves. We can feel sorry for ourselves, and think, “Oh, there's only me to look after me, poor me.” And that too is stuff that we need to work through. But every wound, be it in retrospect, has the possibility of broadening my heart, of deepening my compassion, and making me more humane. And if we reflect on that word in the light of a God who has become man, by becoming more humane in the deepest and truest sense, we move also towards that promise which is uttered in the second letter of St. Peter—of the divinization of our being, of the participation in divine nature.

### **Adrianna**

Thank you, Bishop. That's really moving. I am struck by the shallowness of the cultural understanding of healing that you touched on at the beginning, the commodification of healing, and this expectation that healing means—just as in the image of the heart—that it should be perfected and not able to be hurt by whatever had wounded it.

But what you're reflecting, what redemptive healing is, a healed heart is a wounded heart.

### **Bishop Varden**

And I think that's sort of truer to experience, wouldn't you say? When did you last encounter a heart that was unwounded? We spend a lot of time pretending that we're not wounded and that we have no wounds. The challenge is to find a balance between the fetishization of wounds and pretending that they don't exist. And I think that's precisely where the Christian narrative and the Christian mystery helps us and liberates us. And that's good news and it's good news worth sharing.

### **Giuliana**

Yeah. And it strikes me that this acknowledgement of our heart as wounded is the necessary prerequisite for us to beg for healing. We can't beg for healing if we don't realize and accept that we are wounded and this is something else that touches on the misunderstanding of healing in our culture. Just as our culture assumes that we can heal ourselves, the Christian position is that Christ is our divine healer—and yet Christ does ask for our participation. We have a responsibility in this, we have a role in this to play, just as he asked the man with the withered hand to stretch it out so that he could heal his hand.

So could you just talk a little bit about this method of God, that respects our freedom? What do you find allows you to live this way, to be in the position of an authentic beggar?

### **Bishop Varden**

Well, I think that's work in progress. And it's something we've constantly got to practice in different circumstances.

Because life isn't just a fixed reality, is it? It keeps reconfiguring itself with new challenges. But you refer to the man with a withered hand, and it's a really good example. There's also the example of the paralytic at the sheep gate, who's been lying there for many years, and he has a ready explanation for why he hasn't been healed. There's no one to shove him into the water on time. And then Christ looks at him and listens to this, and here's what he says: he asks, “But do you want to be healed?”

Because the fact is that we can become so used to living, to lying on our stretcher, even if it is uncomfortable. At least I know where I am. And people relate to me in a certain way that can be reassuring. And it's the curious paradox, and it's like a perverse paradox of our human experience, that we can become quite attached to our wounds. And so, I think the motif you point to, by citing that instance of the man with a withered hand, is an important one, which prompts me to ask myself, “But, do I actually collaborate with this healing, saving grace that I pray for? Or do I not?”

### **Sofia**

I think another virtue that's intimately tied to that openness and desire for asking for healing is also perseverance, because it doesn't—for most of us—doesn't occur overnight as perhaps the physical effects of the paralytics healing did.

### **Bishop Varden**

Absolutely.

### **Sofia**

But it requires perseverance and hope so as we're thinking about all of us, our listeners, everyone who's reading your book, the whole church, really, as we go through this journey through the desert of Lent, asking for the resurrection: what is it that we must overcome to discover the promise of Christ's wounds as a fount of healing? Especially when those of us who are a bit more impatient, like myself, are tempted to throw in the towel when we don't see concrete signs that the healing we're asking for is on its way.

### **Bishop Varden**

Well, one thing we can do is to reflect on that scriptural insight that a thousand years are like a single day in the face of the Lord. And to see ourselves in a realistic context.

Another really important thing is to occasionally look back over our lives. To perform a careful Lectio Divina of our own salvation history. And to remember those times when the healing touch of God has been palpably real, to remember moments of grace, to remember credible witnesses I've encountered.

It's extremely pedagogical that the Church during Lent each year lets us reread the Exodus story. And remember how throughout the Pentateuch, the people of Israel is asked to tell this story one generation to the next, and always to insist that this did not happen just to our father, it happened to us.

So to remember ourselves into the great story of a salvific purpose, and to remember how it has actually worked out in our own lives. And the chances are that if we practice that work of constructive remembrance, perseverance and hope will be much less difficult.

### **Adrianna**

I'm struck that the act of remembrance for me is much easier in community. Like I'm thinking about if I was hurt by something with my husband, and maybe I'll hold on to that hurt for a couple days before I bring it to him. And he might say, well, I remember that differently. And then he'll share me his perspective and that will illumine this whole new aspect of what happened.

And maybe thirdly, I'll be aware of my own participation in that hurt and bring that to confession, and the priest will illumine this whole other aspect of the wound. And without others,

I'm only left in my own self centeredness, which often for me just leads to a nurturing of my own perspective of the wound.

So I'm struck that the participation of others is what helps me to remember.

### **Bishop Varden**

Absolutely. And I think you point towards something which is really important there in the process of human maturing and growth, which is the, again, the intentional deprivatization of wounds.

### **Giuliana**

Bishop Varden, we are closing in on our time, but I had one final question that I would love to, to ask.

I'm curious about whether this book, which was written in anticipation of this Lenten season, whether it's changed the way you have been experiencing this Lent? In general, what have been the fruits for you of this deep contemplation on the suffering body of Christ?

### **Bishop Varden**

It's been very graced, really, because I've lived with versions of this text, the medieval poem for most of my life.

I discovered that in my twenties, but living extremely closely and intimately with it and working at it and trying to means to me and to others has been a chastening experience and a helpful experience. It has made me even more of a resolute Christian realist: conscious of the astounding nearness of Christ's saving word and at the same time of the sublimity of the divine mystery that it expresses.

### **Sofia**

Thank you. At the conclusion of every episode, we offer our listeners a recommendation of some form of media, whether art or literature or film. And a monthly challenge, or an invitation to prayer or practice that helps deepen the understanding of the topic at hand. We'd be very grateful if you'd offer these to our listeners for this month's episode.

So media recommendation and a monthly challenge related to healing wounds.

### **Bishop Varden**

Well, in terms of a recommendation, I'd suggest just dwelling on that question at the sheep gate, launched to the paralytic. "Do you want to be healed?" And then, to reflect on our own lives, carefully, serenely, but at the same time probing, and ask, "Are there aspects of my life, areas of my life, in which, explicitly or implicitly, I in fact say, no to that question?" That, I think, would be a useful Lenten practice.

As for an artistic proposition, this poem by Arnulf of Leuven has—and I speak about that briefly in the last chapter of the book—has actually given rise to a lot of literary production and musical production. We find versions of Arnulf's text in German translation in Bach's St. Matthew Passion. But a work that in a particular way expounds parts of the poem and the mystery it represents is a series of cantatas by Bach's slightly older contemporary, Diedrich Buxtehude, and the cantatas are published under the title *Membra Jesu Nostri*, so the members of our Jesus. It follows the sevenfold division of the poem, dwelling on the wounds to Christ's feet, his knees, his hands, his breast, his heart, his head, and his side, and, links parts from Arnold's poem to scriptural passages and sets them to sublime music.

So that's well worth listening to. You can find any number of recordings of that work easily, in a record shop or on YouTube. There's one particular recording that one can find as a video recording with a Spanish ensemble conducted by Jordi Savall that is particularly striking and beautiful. So I'd recommend that.

### **Sofia**

Thank you. I will put a link to that particular recording in the show notes. I had the great joy of hearing the cycle of cantatas live at my college in Cambridge as a student, and heartily join you in the recommendation to all of our listeners. Well, Bishop Varden, thank you very much for your time and please know of our, our prayers for you.

We would ask all of our listeners, if they haven't picked up your book yet, to certainly read this wonderful text during the season of Lent. As ever, for all of our listeners, you can find the other works that we referenced in our show notes. And you can reach us through our website, [pilgrimsoulpodcast.com](http://pilgrimsoulpodcast.com). Bishop Varden's own blog is *Coram Fratibus*, so we heartily recommend that to you as well. Please know of our prayers for you, and have a beautiful month.