

## Annual World Day of the Sick Mass

*(James 5:13-16; Mt.11:25-30)*

February 8, 2019 12:00 Noon Lawrence Center/Borgess Hospital

This Gospel passage in general, and the last verse in particular, are among the most comforting and encouraging passages in the entire Gospel.... "Come to Me.....". Any invitation is an expression of Love; most especially at the times when we need it most---when we're tired, worn out, sick and suffering. Come to Me, and I will make it all better. Who of us doesn't remember those many moments of our childhood when no matter what our injury, imagined or real, a good hug by those who love us---especially our dear Mothers---would make it all better. "Come here and let me kiss it!"

But if we listen again to the verses before that invitation, we get to listen in on part of an intimate conversation between Jesus and His Father; Jesus realizes that His Father has entrusted Him with everything---He has "given" Him the "blank check" of His complete endorsement/trust/confidence. And so it was in that spirit that Jesus, in turn, said "come to Me, and I will **give you** what your heart's desire.

That's the true meaning of "gift". And that's the theme of this year's World Day of the Sick Mass: "*You received without payment; give without payment.*" (Mt.10:8)

As you know, Pope St. John Paul established these annual days of special prayer for the Sick 27 years ago in 1992 in conjunction with the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Each year, the Pope's special Mass is held in a different place---this year in Calcutta, India, the place where St. (Mother) Teresa lived and worked among the poor, the sick and the dying.

In Pope Francis' Message for this 27<sup>th</sup> World Day of the Sick, he emphasizes the importance of the "gift" of ministry to the sick. Perhaps we don't tend to look at care of the sick in that way.

Perhaps for some, it is part of your professional responsibility, which is wonderful. Pope Francis emphasizes how important that part is when he said "Caring for the sick requires professionalism, tenderness, straightforward and simple gestures freely given like a caress that makes others feel loved." We need

our care for the sick to be professional and excellent, and we are grateful to everyone here at Ascension/Borgess Medical Center for making that be your first priority. We are proud of this hospital that continues the intentions of the Sisters of St. Joseph, and the ministry of Jesus in caring for the sick. But there's more to it than professionalism.

It all comes back to "Gift". And that takes us back to the Gospel passage, when Jesus was reflecting on the fact that His Father had entrusted Him----given Him---everything.

As Pope Francis points out in this year's Message, the Incarnation itself is the greatest Gift of God's Love as He gave the world His only-begotten Son in the Birth of Jesus into human time and place to be God with us. And of course, we are not far from entering into the Season of Lent which will urge us to turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel so that we can truly celebrate the ultimate Gift of Jesus' Sacrifice on the Cross, the Gift of the Eucharist and the graces of all the other Sacraments, and the Resurrection which conquered the last words of sickness and death for all eternity!

So Pope Francis urges us to stop and not only be grateful once again for the Gift that Jesus is to us, but the fact that everything that WE have is "Gift". As Pope Francis writes: "Each of us is poor, needy and destitute. When we are born, we require the care of our parents to survive, and at every stage of life, we remain in some way dependent on the help of others. We will always be conscious of our limitations.....A frank acknowledgement of this truth keeps us humble and spurs us to practice solidarity as an essential virtue in life."

That takes us back to the "theme" for this year's observance of the World Day of the Sick. Those words, "you have received without payment; therefore, give without payment" are words spoken by Jesus to the Apostles when He was sending them out for their first missionary journey. In that instruction, He said: *"As you go, proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering with diseases, drive out demons. You received without payment, give without payment."*

This understanding of "gift" goes well beyond something special that we choose to give to another on a special occasion---like wrapping up a Birthday gift in special paper, and giving it once a year. No, the Holy Father is reminding us

that “gift” is another word for “responsibility”. What we’ve been given, we must give to others for their well-being.

Finally, Pope Francis focuses a large part of his instruction to the importance of Catholic healthcare facilities who also have a responsibility to “give” ---to lovingly and generously provide care for those who are in need. I know we take great pride in the fact that Ascension/Borgess is outstanding in that regard---in the ways that we here care for the poor and anyone in need, in keeping with our ministry, and certainly in keeping with the Holy Father’s theme---what we’ve been given----entrusted with---here at Borgess, we in turn give to others, with those same words of Jesus: “Come to us, you who are weary and burdened, and we will give you the comfort of Jesus.”---- Thank you for that!

And Pope Francis also spends a lot of time in acknowledging the role that “Volunteers” play in this important ministry of healthcare. He praised the generosity of volunteers who, as he said, are so important and who “eloquently embody the spirituality of the Good Samaritan.” As He wrote: “I express my gratitude to all those associations of volunteers committed to the transport and assistance of patients, and all those that organize the donation of blood, tissues and organs.....(as well as those who) advocate for the rights of the sick (and those who) raise awareness and encourage prevention.”

The wonderful Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy that take place here at Ascension/Borgess, and in every parish in our Diocese through the pastoral and sacramental programs of caring for the sick, are one of the ways that we, as Disciples of Jesus can continue to “give” to those who are in such need in a spirit of care and concern, and in the example of Jesus’ Love for us.

May our dear Blessed Mother, the Help of the Sick, pray for us and intercede for all of us through her Son, and our Lord, Jesus Christ! Amen!