

## **28<sup>th</sup> Annual World Day of the Sick Mass**

Feb. 10, 2020 11:00 a.m. Ascension Borgess Hospital

*Holy Father's Message: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28)*

*(Is. 61:1-3; James 5:13-16; Mt. 11:25-30)*

As you know, Pope St. John Paul II established this Annual World Day of the Sick 28 years ago in 1992 in conjunction with the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, which the whole Church will celebrate tomorrow. Since we are gathered together today, we are actually anticipating this Special Day just a bit.

The theme of this year's World Day of the Sick Mass is taken from the comforting words of Jesus that we just heard proclaimed in our Gospel passage: "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.*" (Mt. 11:28)

Obviously, when a person experiences any kind of sickness, or battles any disease, that's real suffering; and depending on the degree of that illness, that can be a great burden to carry. As we know, Jesus came into the world to bring us healing, mercy and forgiveness---primarily from what we suffer spiritually, that is the negative effects of sin in our lives and in the world. But Jesus also had a compassionate Heart for those who suffered from physical ailments and the burdens of sickness and disease.

In fact in the Gospel for the day---the one listed in our worship aide from the 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, verses 53-56---we see Jesus being almost overrun by people who, as soon as the people recognized Jesus as the One they had heard so much about Who was doing miraculous healings, as St. Mark tells us, they "*scurried about the surrounding country and began to bring in the sick on mats to wherever they heard He was. Whatever villages or towns or countryside He entered, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and begged Him that they might touch only the tassel on His cloak; and as many as touch it were healed.*" That's pretty amazing----Jesus clearly wanted to bring us healing, both for our souls and our bodies.

We chose this special Gospel passage today because it is the theme of Pope Francis' 28<sup>th</sup> World Day of the Sick Message which reveals to us Jesus' most fervent desire---that we be one

in Him. The part of that Gospel passage that is most appealing to us is the part in which Jesus invites us to “come to Him to find rest from our labors”, correct? But before that beautiful passage that makes up this year’s theme, we have to pay close attention to those verses which come before: .....part of an intimate conversation between Jesus and His Father-----“*Father, Lord of heaven and earth, to You I offer praise....No one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son---and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.*” It’s all about **knowing** God---intimate knowledge of God---and the only way for us to know the Father is to get to know the Son.

It was in **that spirit** that Jesus then said “*Come to Me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you.....Learn from me..... Your souls will find rest.*” Of course we take comfort in that heart-felt invitation that Jesus extends. 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”, we hear Jesus say, and I’ll 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!” That’s the true meaning of healing---the sense of wholeness, and the assurance that all will be well.

Jesus looks upon those to whom He extends this invitation with great compassion and unconditional Love, whether they were the untold numbers of people being brought to Him on mats wherever He went (as Mark’s Gospel so graphically described), or as we heard Him in our Gospel for this World Day of the Sick.

As Pope Francis said so beautifully in his Message for this special Day: “*Jesus looks upon a wounded humanity with eyes that gaze into the heart of each person. That gaze is not one of indifference; rather, it embraces people in their entirety, each person in his or her health condition, discarding no one, but rather inviting everyone to share in His life and to experience His tender love.*”

Jesus understands “human weakness” because He allowed Himself to not just take on our human nature, but to experience the most extreme of human sufferings, all the while taking on Himself the sins of the whole world, including my sins, and your sins. And so when Jesus invites us to “come to Him” with our burdens, with our labors, with our sickness, with our sins, with our deep dark secrets of guilt or shame, we know that He can understand us because He

has been there. He “knows” us! And when we come to Him, He wants us to “know” Him----not just to come to Him for a miracle and then go off on our own; not just to come to Him for healing, and then its back to business as usual. No, Jesus wants us to come to know Him, so that we can be “known”, and “loved”, and be assured at the depths of our souls, that all will be well. Like our Mothers did for us---but at a much deeper level.

Pope Francis' Message addresses many different groupings of people. He speaks first to those in the world who are ill. He reminds them that when they “*come to Jesus, they will find light to brighten their darkest moments and hope to soothe your distress; In Him, they will find strength to face all the worries and questions that assail you during this “dark night” of body and soul.*” And then He concludes his comments to those who are ill by saying: “*Christ did not give us prescriptions, but through His passion, death and resurrection, He freed us from the grip of evil.*”

The Holy Father also addresses the important work/ministry of physicians, nurses, medical and administrative professionals, assistants and volunteers. He offers this very important reminder: “*Dear healthcare professionals, let us always remember that diagnostic, preventive and therapeutic treatments, research, care and rehabilitation are always in the service of the sick person; indeed the noun “person” takes priority over the adjective “sick”. In your work, may you always strive to promote the dignity and life of each person, and reject any compromise in the direction of euthanasia, assisted suicide, or suppression of life, even in the case of terminal illness.*” He continues with this caution about the most fundamental of all God's teachings about the value of Life: “*Life must be welcomed, protected, respected and served from its beginning to its end: both human reason and faith in God, the author of life, require this.*”

He also addresses those very sad situations where there is nothing more that medical science can do: “*When you can no longer provide a cure, you will still be able to provide care and healing, through gestures and procedures that give comfort and relief to the sick person.*”

As we're gathered for this Annual World Day of the Sick Day Mass at our Catholic Hospital of Ascension Borgess, I have great confidence that the care for and treatment of those who are sick is done in that very spirit of which Pope Francis speaks, and I trust, are also providing the same kind of compassionate and Christ-like Loving care that Jesus invites us to find in Him. 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.

Pope Francis also focuses a large part of his instruction to the importance of Catholic healthcare facilities which also have a responsibility to lovingly and generously provide care for those who are “burdened” by human sickness, and especially those who are in need of assistance. I know we take great pride in the fact that Ascension/Borgess is outstanding in that regard---in the ways that you care for the poor and anyone in need, in keeping with what Catholic healthcare ministry intends, and certainly in keeping with the essence of the Holy Father’s theme. For all intents and purposes, Borgess Hospital says to all: “Come to us, you who are weary and burdened, and we will give you the comfort of Jesus.”---- Thank you for that!

Finally, we know that Volunteers play an enormous role in helping to provide the pastoral and medical care to those who come here to Ascension Borgess to be cared for. And Pope Francis speaks directly to you, Volunteers, when he says: *“I offer heartfelt thanks to all those volunteers who serve the sick, often compensating for structural shortcomings, while reflecting the image of Christ, the Good Samaritan, by their acts of tender love and closeness to those in need.”* I too echo those same sentiments in expressing great gratitude to all those who give so generously of your time and expertise out of love for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

And so, as we celebrate this Mass, and experience the powerful graces of the Holy Eucharist, as well as the Sacramental Healing graces of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick which some of you will be receiving shortly, let us pray that our dear Blessed Mother, the Help of the Sick, will pray for us and intercede for all of us through her Son, and our Lord, Jesus Christ!

And may we all accept Jesus’ Invitation to come to Him, to know Him, and, in turn, to be known ---- and then, all will be well! Amen!