

Annual Mass for World Day of the Sick/Our Lady of Lourdes

February 12, 2018 Borgess Hospital Noon

(Is.61:1-3; Rom.8:18-27; Lk.11:5-13)

Mrs. Kathy Young, the CEO of Borgess Medical System and all those who are members of the Administration and Medical Staff: Doctors/Nurses/Aides; dear Sisters of St. Joseph; Fr. Kevin, our Hospital Chaplain, and my brother Priests; Patients, Family members, Volunteers----all of us, sisters and brothers in Christ!

Jesus makes it very clear in today's Gospel: Ask----Seek----Knock. Do not stop coming to God our Father when we have a serious need or problem, and He will respond. The little story that Jesus uses is one that we can relate to because that's pretty much how we, as human beings, work when someone comes to us for help. Sometimes we have to be badgered into it, and sometimes, we only reluctantly help just to stop the one who's pestering us, as the man did in Jesus' story as Jesus told us: "*even if the man does not get up and take care of the man because of friendship, he will do so because of his persistence, and give him as much as he needs*" (and we would add) just to get rid of him or shut him up! However that's where the comparison stops because we don't have to badger our Loving God: He hears our prayers always.

Jesus' point is for *our* sake----to not give up. We can't pray, and then because God doesn't instantly respond to our needs, or immediately answer our prayer, conclude that He doesn't care and quit trying.

So, Jesus' message is to ask----seek----knock---do whatever it takes. Be confident in the fact that if we ask God for something important to us, He will not ignore us, nor will He, as we heard in the Gospel, be like the human father who gives his son a snake if he asks for a fish, or gives him a scorpion if he asks for an egg---(thank God). So, the point is: persistence, or as we might also say, perseverance----Don't give up.

Today we celebrate the 26th Annual World Day of the Sick established by Pope St. John Paul II in 1992. He purposely chose the important Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, which this year was co-opted by yesterday's 6th Sunday of the Year, but which we have transferred to celebrate today in this special Mass.

As we know it was in 1858 when our Blessed Mother appeared multiple times to 14-year old Bernadette Soubirous, revealing herself as the Immaculate Conception. She urged her to tell the world to turn away from sin and turn back to her Son, Jesus. But besides being worried about the spiritual crisis facing the world, Our Blessed Mother also had great concern for all those who were sick or suffering, physically, of course, but also with any spiritual suffering of any sort. She directed Bernadette to dig for water in an area where there wasn't any; as she did, a small stream began to flow, and finally a great body of water. Bernadette was told to convince the local priest to build a church near that stream. As we know, that stream became a Holy Pool of sorts which, over these 160 years, has been the source of miraculous healings of thousands of sick and suffering people, not able to be explained by medical science, but confirmed that they were true healings.

It is in that spirit of giving thanks to God for all the ways that He demonstrates for us His love for all people and His desire that we all be made whole in His love, spiritually and physically, that we come together here, in our Catholic Hospital---a place of caring for the sick---a place dedicated to healing, comfort and consolation for those in need of excellent medical care in an environment of faith and human respect---and celebrate this wonderful Day of Prayer in union with the whole Church.

Pope Francis' message for this year's World Day of the Sick is entitled: "*Mater Ecclesiae (Mother of the Church): Behold your son...Behold your Mother*" (Jn. 19,26-27) Of course, it is based on that moving scene in St. John's Gospel when Jesus, Crucified on the Cross and dying for the remission of the sins of the world, among His final words, expressed His concern for His Mother, but also for the needs of all humanity by entrusting her into John's care, but also entrusting John and all humanity, into the maternal care of Our Blessed Mother. From that moment on, not only did John and the other Apostles provide for Mary's care and protection for the rest of her life, but she began her mission of being concerned for the physical and spiritual well-being of all humanity, a mission that has continued ever since that moment, and will continue for the rest of human time.

Mary's sole purpose is to help bring people to her Son Jesus for salvation. As Jesus had as such a primary purpose in His earthly life to make people "whole" by physical healings and by forgiving their sins, so that remains Jesus' mission now carried out through the Church----to bring wholeness to every human being, which primarily means trying to root sin out of our lives,

but also includes the desire for physical wholeness and healing from human disease, suffering and pain.

That's why the Church's ministry to the sick is so integral to all that the Church does, and that's particularly why the Church's ministry includes our wonderful Catholic Hospital Systems that we can be so proud of throughout the world.

Here at Borgess Health System, which is part of the Ascension Health System, we know that we not only provide first rate and excellent health care to all patients, but that the care is given out of a commitment to follow Jesus who, as we know, loved all people, with a particular concern for all those on the margins of society.

In Pope Francis' message this year, he points out this aspect of Catholic medical care to the poor as a special responsibility we have, and to avoid the tendency of most other hospital systems to have the "bottom line" as their motivation. Rather for us, the Pope writes, "Organizational intelligence and charity require that the *person* of the patient be respected in his/her dignity and always kept at the center of the process of care." He goes on to remind us that everyone involved in Catholic Hospitals are an integral part of the Church's ministry to the sick, when he writes: "Therefore, doctors and nurses, priests, consecrated persons and volunteers, family members and all those involved in caring for the sick participate in this ecclesial mission---a shared responsibility."

That's what the Prophet Isaiah was saying so beautifully in today's First Reading: God's very Spirit is sent to be with us---When we are anointed in the Spirit of God, our life is made new, or as Isaiah said: "*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me---and sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly and to heal the brokenhearted.*"

As part of this Mass, we will very shortly "anoint" with the Blessed Oil of the Sick, those seeking God's healing in their lives, healing of both body and their spirit---their very being. It is through this Anointing of the Sick that the Church carries on the mission of helping us to know God's love, mercy, compassion and healing very personally. That beautiful Sacramental Healing is one part of the Church's mission to help, (as Pope Francis likes to say) "to accompany" people on their journey, including through times of illness, sickness and ultimately, the dying process as well. And through it all, we need to "Ask....Seek....Knock"---persevere in our prayers to God, even when we don't have the words.

In today's Second Reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, in one of my favorite passages, he tells us: "*The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness.*" He goes on to remind us that the Spirit intercedes on our own behalf even when we don't have the words, and don't know how to pray as we ought. "*The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be expressed in speech.*" .

Let us give thanks to God for His unconditional love and His desire that we all be healed, body and spirit, by His love and compassion. And may we, in keeping with the theme for this World Day of Prayer for the Sick, "Behold our Mother"---Our Lady of Lourdes and the Mother of the Church, who constantly helps us to live our lives in union with her Son Jesus, in sickness and in health, all the days of our lives.

God bless you, now and always!