**Annual World Day of the Sick Mass---Diocesan Observance**

Feb. 10, 2017 10:00 a.m Borgess Hospital/Lawrence Center

(*Isaiah 61:1-3a; Romans 8:26-28; Matthew 11:25-30*)

**INTRODUCTORY GREETINGS AND WELCOME**:

 Fr. Kevin, our Hospital Chaplain, my brother Priests, dear Sisters, Deacon John Ryder; members of the Administration & Medical Staff---Doctors/Nurses/Aides/Volunteers; Patients…Family….All of us, sisters and brothers in Christ!

Today we celebrate the 25th 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 the whole Church celebrates tomorrow, as the day to observe the World Day of Prayer for the Sick.

As we know it was in 1858 when our Blessed Mother appeared multiple times to 14-year old Bernadette Soubirous and several other young girls, revealing herself as the Immaculate Conception. She urged them to tell the world to turn from sin and turn back to her Son, Jesus. In addition, she urged them to convince the local priest to build a church on that spot where a small stream began to spring up. That stream became a Holy Pool of sorts which, over the 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 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. And so as we prepare to celebrate these Sacred Mysteries….

**Homily:**

Of the many passages in Sacred Scripture that really communicate God’s compassionate love and mercy, there may not be any richer or more beautiful than these words of Jesus in this morning’s Gospel passage: “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”* In that same passage, Jesus is talking to----in deep prayer with---His Heavenly Father. St. Matthew gives us the amazing opportunity to “eavesdrop”, in a way, as Jesus is opening His Heart to God, in these words: “*I give praise to You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.”* While the rest of the world, and all previous generations, addressed God only as the Supreme Being and All-powerful God, Jesus certainly does that when He calls God: “*Lord of heaven and earth”,* but before that, Jesus reveals God as “*Father”.* And not only that, but in these words that we’ve just heard, Jesus is telling us that He and the Father are one as we heard Him say: “*Yes, Father, Your gracious Will is that no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son…and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.”*

Jesus’ mission in this world was first of all to reveal God to us as Loving Father, and Himself as beloved Son, and in doing so, to help us to know that when we live in Christ, we are sons and daughters of “the *Lord of heaven and earth----our Father!”* And so, we receive that most wonderful of all invitations: to come to Jesus to find the comfort of the Father’s love and mercy; to come to Jesus to experience the rest that we all long for from the burdens that we all carry; to come to Jesus, “meek and humble of Heart”, and let Him help us to carry our burdens and lighten our loads. That invitation is for *all* of us----healers and those in need of healing---all of us, sisters and brothers in Christ, sons and daughters of God, our Father.

The theme that Pope Francis has chosen for this 25th World Day of the Sick is: “*Amazement at what God has accomplished*”, and it’s an amplification of our Blessed Mother’s Hymn of Praise that we know as the “Magnificat”: “*The Almighty has done great things for me, and Holy is His Name.”*

Pope Francis indicates that there are three purposes for celebrating this important Day of Prayer: 1. Most obviously, it is a day to reflect on the needs of the sick and of all those who suffer; 2. It is also an occasion for those who care for the sick---family members, health workers, and volunteers----to give thanks for, what Pope Francis so beautifully identifies as: “their God-given vocation of accompanying our infirm brothers and sisters.”; 3. And thirdly, this Day of Prayer helps the whole Church to re-focus on the most basic aspect of the Church’s mission: that is, serving the poor, the infirm, the suffering, the outcast and the marginalized.

That’s why our Catholic hospitals are so important. Of course, we expect nothing less than excellent medical care, reflecting the most advanced technology and research. But at the root of that excellent medical care is the fundamental reason why we do what we do, because here, and in every Catholic Health Care institution, we are the healing Hands and Heart of Jesus. That invitation of Jesus could be on our marquis out front or on our admissions forms: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, (or are sick or infirm in any way), and I will give you excellent treatment, wonderful healthcare and human respect.”

In his message for today’s Day of Prayer, Pope Francis reflected a bit on the Appearance of our Blessed Mother to the 14-year old Bernadette. He reminded us that Bernadette was a child---no one of much stature in those days; she was poor and illiterate. Yet, as Bernadette would report about this Apparition: “The Lovely Lady spoke to me with great respect and without condescension.”

Pope Francis used that beautiful thought to remind us that we too need to treat all those who come to us as **persons**----not as medical conditions; not as a particular diagnosis; not in a certain category of insurance payability----That here, in our Catholic Hospitals, we need to see each patient as a person worthy of our full attention. As our Holy Father wrote: “The sick, and those who are disabled, even severely, have their own inalienable dignity and mission in life. They never become simply objects.”

Jesus identified God, “the Lord of Heaven and Earth”, as His Loving Father---and in turn, our Father as well. Our God has always revealed Himself as One Who wants to be with us, not removed from us. That’s why God has revealed Himself in the first place---so that we could come to know Him and love Him.

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, in the words of Pope Francis, “to accompany” people on their journey, including through times of illness, sickness and ultimately, the dying process as well.

That goes back to what Pope Francis called so beautifully the “God-given vocation” that all of you who “accompany” the sick have. Perhaps you haven’t thought about it that way before. What you do----physicians, nurses, aides, hospital administrators, health care workers at all levels, volunteers and staff, Chaplains and Spiritual Care Department---and of course family members in a most special way---as you accompany those who are sick and in need of God’s comfort and medical technology IS a vocation----a “calling”!

Let Pope Francis’ words spoken to you say it best: “On this 25th World Day of the Sick, I once more offer my prayerful support and encouragement to physicians, nurses, volunteers and all those consecrated men and women committed to serving the sick and those in need. I also embrace the ecclesial and civil institutions working to this end, and the families who take loving care of their sick. And he concludes: “I ask you to join me in praying to Mary. May her maternal intercession sustain and accompany our faith, and obtain for us from Christ her Son hope along our journey of healing and of health, a sense of fraternity and responsibility, a commitment to integral human development and the joy of feeling gratitude whenever God amazes us by His fidelity and His mercy.”

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 do not know how to pray as we ought. The Spirit of God, Who anoints us and sends us to renew the earth, prays for each of us, even when we can’t, or don’t.

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, be filled with “amazement at what God has accomplished.”

God bless you, now and always!

**Prayer of Pope Francis:**

Mary, our Mother, in Christ you welcome each of us as a son or daughter.

Sustain the trusting expectation of our hearts, succor us in our infirmities and sufferings, and guide us to Christ, your Son and our Brother.

Help us to entrust ourselves to the Father Who accomplishes great things….through Christ, our Lord of heaven and earth. Amen!