

Third Sunday of Easter – B – 2015
25th Annual White Mass
G. Shaw/Cathedral of St. Patrick

Thank you, Bishop Cote, for your very kind invitation to be the homilist for this morning's Liturgy.

As my wife and I were leaving the house this morning to come to the Cathedral, my wife, as she usually does, offered some advice. "Remember," she said, "the secret to a good homily is to have a good beginning and a good ending AND to have the two as close together as possible." Sounds like a quote from some famous preacher or theologian, but actually it comes from George Burns of Burns and Allen fame.

As a retired physician, it is indeed my pleasure to be here as we come together on this 3rd Sunday of Easter in the beautiful, recently renovated Cathedral of St. Patrick for the annual diocesan White Mass for Health Care Workers of All Faiths. This is the 25th year that we have celebrated this special mass.

I am sure that those health care workers who are here today do NOT come to be honored or recognized for whom they are or what they do or have done, BUT they are here today to honor him from whom all of their gifts, all their talents, and all of their skills in tending to the needs of God's people come.

We are here today first and foremost to celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist, to worship our Risen Lord and Savior and to give thanks and praise to God.

In celebrating this Liturgy, we ask God's blessing on all those who serve in the medical profession. We are grateful for their service and we take this opportunity to lift up in prayer today nurses and physicians, hospital administrators, EMTs, lab technicians, home health and hospital aides, physical therapists, drug counselors, hospital chaplains, pastoral care associates and those devoted to rehabilitation, and any others whom I may have failed to mention.

Recognizing the importance of the contributions of health care workers, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, said the following in his message for the World Day of the Sick in Rome on February 11 of this year. A part of his message can certainly set our theme for today,

as the Holy Father said, quote: “Time spent with the sick is a holy time. It is a way of praising God who conforms all of us to the image of his Son, who ‘came not to be served but to serve...’” End quote.

I don’t need to remind this group that much of Jesus’ public ministry involved actions of healing. The human person is created in the image and likeness of God Himself, and Christ publicly healed the body and the soul of those who approached him NOT just for the purpose of healing them, BUT as a sign to others NOT of **what he could do**, BUT as a sign of **who he was** – “the chosen one of God; the one who, Isaiah tells us came to “open blind eyes,” to free prisoners from captivity,” to free those who dwell in darkness.” Indeed, He is the “light of the world,” as symbolized by this beautiful Paschal Candle lit anew at the recent Easter Vigil mass to “dispel the darkness of evil.” He wanted to enlighten the minds and convert the heart of those who followed him.

All of Jesus’ physical healings recorded for us in sacred scripture occurred during His brief public ministry during which he spent much of his time teaching his apostles – that group of close friends he himself chose – and of teaching the vast crowds of people who followed him including the Scribes, Pharisees and elders of the synagogue in Jerusalem. All of this activity occurred prior to his redemptive actions of suffering and dying and then rising from the dead on that first Easter Sunday.

Our readings today do not highlight or focus on any of these pre-resurrection events.

Instead, in today’s Gospel account from St. Luke – who tradition tells us was a physician himself – we see a continuation of the appearance of the risen Jesus to his followers on the road to Emmaus. Still confused; still not completely understanding what had just taken place, his disciples still failed to recognize who he was – and isn’t that often our problem – we fail to recognize Jesus among us. But being the loving, compassionate, risen Lord that he is, he tried to show them that it was indeed he himself standing before them. First, seeing that they were “troubled,” he attempted to put them at ease. “Peace be with you,” he said. Then he asked, “Why are you troubled?” Then to reassure him that it was Him, he said, **“Look at my hands and feet and see that it is I myself. Touch me and see for yourselves that a ghost has no flesh**

and bones as I have. As he said this, he showed his hands and feet.” It was the same Jesus they knew who was before them.

In our role as health care providers and care givers, do we recognize Jesus when we see him? He comes to those of us responsible for health care in the person of those for whom we care – our patients – who stand before us ailing, vulnerable, naked, hungry and thirsty – physically, emotionally and spiritually – and in need of the healing power we can exercise through him. If we fail to recognize Jesus in our midst, health care will lose its soul.

Do we see Jesus in the face of that uninsured, homeless man lying on an Emergency Room gurney in the middle of the night suffering from the ravages of AIDS or addiction?

Do we see our suffering Lord in the face of that young mother of three with breast cancer as we walk with her from the OR to the Recovery Room?

Do we see Jesus, our Savior and his Father our Creator in the face of that newborn baby we hold in our hands in the delivery room?

Your calling as health care providers and caregivers is truly a high calling – a calling from God himself – a calling that demands that we see the dignity of all life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.

It is truly a great calling which you have answered, and the greater the call, the greater the responsibility; the greater the responsibility, the greater the power and the presence of God must be in your lives, both personally and professionally.

Thank you for answering that call to a service of healing.

Thank you for caring for those in need, and may God continue to bless you and, in doing so, may His blessing flow through you to those you serve.