

Homily for the John Carroll Society Mass

Laetare Sunday

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 31, 2019

Allow me to begin my offering my sincere thanks to His Eminence Cardinal Wuerl and Monsignor Vaghi for their kind invitation to preach this homily and to celebrate the healing ministry that Christ has given to you. It is an honor and blessing to be with you today.

My friends, you share a noble profession that affords you daily opportunities to share your training, gifts and talents to heal the sick. Such healing is a foretaste of the inbreaking of God's Kingdom into our world through the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Recall the Lord's miracles which healed the sick, helped the lame to walk, gave sight to the blind and even raised the dead. They were signs of this Kingdom where all suffering will be healed, all sickness will be cured and the effects of sin will be made whole. In this sense, your healing work as doctors, nurses, medical practitioners and emergency medical personnel, offered to patients who suffer in many different ways, is a foreshadowing of a healed and transformed life promised us in Christ's Kingdom. For all that you do each day, we are all deeply grateful.

Yet, as important as your work is to heal the body, allow me to suggest that you are called to do more. Yours is a vocation to offer healing beyond your wildest imagination- a healing that cannot be realized by your own human skill or power. It is a healing whose wellspring comes from Christ Himself.

What is this "more"? Perhaps it can be summarized in single question: how can you heal a broken heart? Of course, I speak not of cardiac disease which your skills can often effectively remedy. Rather, I am referring to the spiritual wounds that we all carry and which come to the forefront when we physically suffer or face our own mortality. It may seem like a strange question to ask. Yet, when I have faced suffering at different times in my life, it was the question that haunted me in the silent hours of the night precisely because the heart that was broken was mine. It is a question that no one who experiences bodily suffering can

escape. It is a question that must be faced by all who are disciples of a crucified Savior who entered into our fractured world to heal hearts burdened by disease and old age, hearts that struggle with doubts and fears, hearts tortured by our own self-inflicted sins and the sinful betrayal at the hand of our neighbor. How often have we looked ourselves in the mirror, or looked in the eyes of a friend or a patient and have seen the raw pain of a broken heart. How can such hearts be healed?

Perhaps it was to teach us the answer to this question that the Lord's Spirit inspired Saint Luke, a young physician, to become His evangelist. For doctors, both in ancient and modern times seek to remedy the brokenness of life by relying upon their own skills, knowledge or the tools at their disposal. We can only imagine how many times Luke tried to alleviate physical sufferings in his practice as a physician. Yet it was only after his transformation in Christ, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that Luke learned another way to heal. It is the way illustrated in the parable of the prodigal son. It is the way that I would like to suggest that you as both physicians and believers are asked to walk.

For the key figure in that famous parable is neither the sinful nor righteous son. Rather, it is the father, who offers both sons his unyielding love- a love that is wildly generous, even reckless. By his loving acceptance of each of his sons, despite the outrageous sins of the younger one and the quiet sinful righteousness of the older son, the father assures them both, in their own personal struggles, of his acceptance, forgiveness and a loving welcome into his home. He hosts a "feast" as an expression of the joy that dwells in the father's heart who eagerly awaits their response, and offers them an opportunity to share in the precious gift of his joy.

It is the gift of joy that can heal a wounded heart in a way that our skills cannot imagine. When anyone enters into the mystery of personal suffering, it is our heavenly Father who stands at the door of our hearts to offer us the assurance of His love that never fails and accompanying gift of His joy that alone can heal our greatest wounds, the most broken of all hearts, even when suffering will end in physical death. As co-workers of Christ's Kingdom,

your ministry need not be confined to heal only broken bodies. You can also help heal broken hearts by dispensing the medicine of the Father's gift of joy.

What then is this heavenly medicine? What is true joy? Enshrined in this city is perhaps the most famous political testament to freedom ever written, the Declaration of Independence. In its preamble we are told that all men and women are created equal and that we have a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is sobering to contemplate how these promises remain unfulfilled, in a nation where life is attacked in the womb, where freedom has degenerated into unbridled liberty to make any choice despite its consequences and the pursuit of happiness has unleashed a reckless self-centeredness that has left many wondering whether they are loveable or loved by anyone. It is this third "right" to happiness that our founding fathers were comfortable to promise us. The Lord does not. He offers us the promise of joy and these two are not the same reality.

While happiness is a state of contentment dependent upon the circumstances around us, which are always fickle and change, joy is the gift of a deep, abiding sense of assurance that comes from the realization that God's love will never fail us, even in our darkest moments or moments of greatest suffering. Saint Julian of Norwich describes joy as arising from the knowledge that "all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well" in Christ. T.S. Eliot, in *Little Gidding*, the fourth and final poem of his *Four Quartets*, describes this reality as flowing from "the purification of the motive in the ground of our beseeching." For believers, this ground is not something but Someone. He is our gracious Father who offers us His unfailing love through His beloved Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit- a love that comes to us in our suffering and will cause our fears to subside, our anxieties to diminish and gives us strength to persevere to the end. Our Father extends to us His loving arms and has promised us a place in His banquet where we will be healed, made whole and share eternal glory. The gift of divine joy gives us the abiding assurance that we will all be made whole at His banquet- patient and doctor alike.

My friends, this is our challenge. By your words, actions, demeanor and commitment, you can become "dispensers of the divine medicine" of joy that will allow your patients to face

their suffering with the assurance of the Father's unfailing love for them. In such moments of great vulnerability, Christ can heal their broken hearts through you, even if their broken bodies may never heal.

We cannot truly heal anyone on our own. Only Christ brings authentic and lasting healing. It is Christ's gift of loving mercy, revealed in His Passion and Cross, that can enlighten our minds, comfort us in our doubts, give consolation in our suffering and forgive the burden of our sins. As water that is poured on dry land finds the cracks in the hardened soil to penetrate its very depths, so too does Christ's love, poured out upon saints and sinner alike, seeks the cracks of every broken heart to bring it assurance, healing and hope. Luke understood this as a physician of Christ's love. Luke healed broken hearts not by anything he did on his own but by allowing the Lord's love to become real in him and to dispense the unyielding, uncompromising and triumphant medicine of joy in the hearts of those whom he served.

St. Theresa of Avila, herself a Doctor of the Church, summarizes this best when she said, "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body." The father of the prodigal son challenges us to offer our feet, eyes, hands, talents and knowledge to be channels of God's joyful love, so that broken bodies and broken hearts can be healed.

Today we have come to eat at the feast of the Divine Physician, to thank him for the healing ministry that he has given you and to recommit ourselves to become physicians of broken hearts. Let us leave this sacred place resolved to do so, one broken heart at a time.