
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11: WORLD DAY OF THE SICK



The World Day of the Sick, established by Pope John Paul II, is meant to raise the awareness of all the People of God and, therefore, of Catholic health institutions and civil society itself to the necessity of ensuring that the sick get medical assistance in the best conditions, of helping the sick discover the value of suffering, and of involving dioceses, Christian communities and religious groups in health ministry. In preparing for this Day I referred to the Introduction of the Ritual of the sacraments of the sick; I found there an amazing treasure!

NOBLE CONCERN

“When the Church looks after the sick, it serves Christ in the suffering members of the Mystical Body. And in imitation of the Lord Jesus who went about doing good and in healing, the Church obeys the Lord’s command to care for the sick. The Church shows this concern in several ways, such as by visiting the sick and bringing them relief through the sacrament of Anointing, by strengthening them through the sacrament of the Eucharist offered in time of illness or as viaticum, and by praying for those who are close to death and placing them in the care of God.” A total pastoral health plan which requires special attention to every sick person.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

“The existence of suffering is one of the important existential questions; it is at times viewed as a scandal. This suffering takes on many forms, and physical illness is but one of them. Especially if the illness is serious, it takes on greater importance as it reminds us that the mortal condition is a dimension of human living. Still, illness must not be viewed as something apart, because it is part of God’s plan that humans fight against illness with all the strength at its command, and that it pursue the good that is health, so that man and woman continue to carry out their task in both society and the Church. Fighting illness is not for the sick only. Those who care for the sick must look for what needs to be done, experimented and tried to alleviate their bodies and ease their minds. The initiatives of science and technology in the service of life, the efforts and competency shown by those involved in the care of the sick - whether Christians or not - these are considered by the Church as a kind of sharing in Christ’s ministry of healing the sick.” Remember the words of Jesus: “I was sick and you visited me... What you did to the least of my brothers and sisters you did to me.” Jesus identified with the sick. The mystery of faith among the sick and their caretakers is great indeed!

WITH CHRIST

“When visited by illness, the Christian shares in the human lot. Enlightened by faith, he knows that he is still loved by Christ who, during his life on earth often visited and healed the sick. He refused that they be segregated from others. He himself suffered, witnessing to humankind unto death on the cross, to the true face of God, a God who is not aloof but who is in solidarity with man in all things but sin. Since Christ himself suffered he can help the sick and the suffering. As a member of the Body of Christ, the Christian who struggles against suffering and illness can in a mysterious way experience a special closeness with Christ.” These words quoted are only the first words of the Ritual: you can feel the theological and pastoral depth of these notes.

A PATH TO LIFE

“In his faith in the God of Jesus Christ, the Christian draws light for his life which is confronted by suffering; he also finds greater courage to support and confront his condition in communion with Christ. Nevertheless, his faith is often shaken by many questions, and it needs to be enlightened and strengthened. Every Christian is called to live his daily life in close union with Jesus Christ. This also applies to the sick Christian who, although afflicted with illness, is aware that his life is not reduced to simply being ill. In the most painful moments when he is confronted with the difficult realities of sickness, suffering and death, he will find comfort in uniting himself to the passion of Jesus Christ. For Christ, the sufferings he underwent were not an end in themselves. They became the path to life, because of his love for us and for his Father. So, our sufferings can be for the Christian a path to Life in union with Jesus Christ who even now suffers and grieves when one of us, a member of his Body, is sorely afflicted by suffering.” These words might seem like an overstatement, expanding as they do the mystery of suffering.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

“Christ’s attitude regarding the sick is a challenge to all Christians: Christ calls upon those who bring comfort and physical relief to the sick to be attentive to the entire person. In the Body of Christ which is the Church, if one member suffers then all the members feel the pain. In the same way all the baptised are careful to share in this service of mutual charity within the Body of Christ. This service may be diverse: fighting illness, brotherly presence and affection for the sick, witness and the prayer of faith. When it celebrates the sacrament of the Sick the Christian community is called on to recognise the true face of God who showed himself to us by taking our own suffering upon himself. The Christian community is also invited to show in its behaviour what it proclaims in the sacraments it celebrates, namely, attention to the sick, care by the community, sharing in the suffering, and unfailing hope in Jesus Christ.” I hope that the World Day of the Sick, February 11, be for the diocese of Edmundston be another timely date. All the sick are in my daily prayer, and I also pray for all medical, nursing and supporting personnel, as well as all the volunteers. May this Day be good to you!

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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