
THE SPECIAL ROLE OF THE SICK



There is something important I would like to look at closely with you, today, something that is part of our everyday reality. It is the special and indispensable role of the sick, in our Church. They, too, are builders of the Diocese of Edmundston. Beyond the causes of their suffering, there are baptised and confirmed brothers and sisters who are afflicted with illness and all kinds of trials, and who are like major partners in this Church we are building every day, guided by the Holy Spirit.

INACTION AND SUFFERING

The human being is called to happiness, but each day we experience countless forms of suffering and pain. "We know that all creation groans and is in agony until now. Not only that, but we ourselves, although we have the Spirit as first fruits, groan inwardly while we await the redemption of our bodies" (Rm. 8:22-23). This is our hope. Bishop Fernand Lacroix, who knew illness from personal experience, wrote in the summer of 1982 after having been through three illnesses (detached retina, gall bladder operation, and heart attack): "The year 1981-1982 will have been a year of illness, for me. This has helped me experience a bit of what some among you experience months and years on end. Suffering in union with Jesus makes up for what is lacking to the Passion of Christ, as Saint Paul says. When one thinks apostolate and ministry, one thinks especially of "action" and not so much of 'prayer,' 'suffering,' and 'inaction,' lived in union with Christ. Yet, the Passion remains the great means of salvation as long as it is directed to the Resurrection. Bishop Lacroix had no inkling then that there were other trials awaiting him and that he would be obliged to resign as Bishop of Edmundston. Twenty years ago on May 31, in a letter to Pope John Paul II asking to be relieved of his functions, he wrote: "It is with much sorrow that I ask this because I loved the Church committed to my care and tried my best to serve it well. The Lord seems to have other plans for me, and I submit with all the faith and spirit of obedience that I can muster." Who could doubt the value of such a gesture, such a sacrifice? He gave his life for Christ and his Church in a totally different way from what he could have foreseen.

DAY TO DAY

The diocesan Church of Edmundston benefits from the many sick who associate themselves generously with Christ's redemptive Passion. This generous offering of their lives and their suffering shows the depth of human love. "There is no greater love than giving one's life for one's friends." Suffering destroys many projects, even the most apostolic, like those which Bishop Lacroix had in mind, but it is in new and even greater ways that the sick are called to share in the building up of the Kingdom of God. The words of St. Paul can be a whole life's programme, a lamp unto our feet: "In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the Church." (Col. 1:24) This discovery led St. Paul to exclaim, "I find my joy in the sufferings I endure for you." Many of the sick you know can be heralds of joy in the Holy Spirit, in the midst of their suffering, and in this way be witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus. As for me, I receive that witness every time I visit the hospital.

THE SICK AS MISSIONARIES

Christians who are sick are invited by God not only to unite their sufferings to Christ's Passion, they are asked to welcome in themselves and to pass on to others the strength given by the renewal and joy of the Risen Christ. A big mission, for which I give thanks with you, today. Thank you, brothers and sisters who, often without being aware of it, build up this beloved Church of Edmundston. And thank you, medical personnel, support personnel, volunteers and families of the sick, for the thoroughgoing care of sick who do so much in our midst, for our society and our Church.

“HAPPY ARE YOU WHO WEEP AND MOURN”

You have often heard this beatitude of Jesus: “Blest too are the sorrowing; they shall be consoled.” (Mt. 5:4) One Bible translator has rendered the text in this way: “Forward, those who weep! Forward, you poor, march on, you sick!” Far from evading the human condition, the Gospel of Jesus gives meaning to our daily suffering. Christ did not do away with suffering; he did not even want to unveil for us its mystery. He took it on himself, and that is enough for us to understand its high cost. The Fathers of Vatican II could rightly state: “You who feel more heavily the burden of the cross, you who are poor and neglected, you who mourn and weep, you who are persecuted for justice’s sake, you who are ignored, you the anonymous class of sufferers, take heart, you are the elect of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of hope, happiness, and life, you are the brothers and sisters of the suffering Christ, and with him, if you so will, you save the world. This is the Christian science of suffering, the only one which can bring peace. Know that you are not alone, nor separated, abandoned or useless, but that you are Christ’s elect, his living and transparent image.” On the occasion of the World Day of the Sick, may Our Lady of Sorrows, who was so deeply associated with the sufferings of her Son, fill us with the most precious graces and make us better understand that the heavy crosses as well as the small ones can become glorious crosses.

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