



**White Mass Homily**  
***A Mass offered for those who provide medical care to others***

**The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain**  
**Bishop of Sioux Falls**  
**October 18, 2013**  
***Memorial Feast of Saint Luke the Evangelist***  
**Cathedral of Saint Joseph**

Thank you for coming as we celebrate this “White Mass” where we recognize, honor and pray for all those in the healing ministry of health care, Catholic and not. It is named the White Mass because of your tradition of wearing white garments.

Why then are we priests wearing red? Because this is feast day of St. Luke the Evangelist who was martyred, shed his blood for the faith. He is the patron saint of health care and health care providers. St. Paul tells us he was a physician. He wrote the Gospel of Luke as well as the Acts of the Apostles. Scripture scholars have described the Gospel of Luke as the gospel of mercy, of the poor, of prayer, and of joy. One described Luke’s Gospel as one of compassion and patience with sinners and the suffering. All of which reflect the tapestry of health care.

In both readings today the importance of others is raised. St. Paul in the letter to Timothy speaks of those who were with him and who are now with him, Luke particularly. In the Gospel Jesus sends out the disciples two by two. St. Gregory suggests that is a symbol for living the Great Commandment: to both love God and love neighbor. It also perhaps is a reminder that alone we can do little. We must work together as a team and as a family. You in the health professions know that so well. While we rightly recognize those in the public light, the doctors and administrators. We know that without all those who stand behind them, including nurses, assistants, chaplains, technicians, scientists, maintenance and office staffs and so many others, the outstanding healthcare we on the outside receive would not be possible.

Some view your work as glamorous. Those my age grew up with the cartoon characters in Peanuts. In one cartoon Linus declares to Charlie Brown: “when I grow up I’m going to be a doctor. No, I’m going to be more than a doctor; I’m going to be a great doctor. I want to rise to the greatest height of all; I want to write a syndicated medical column.” You, no matter your role, are great.

Your work is not always glamorous but it is essential. The Church teaches that access to adequate and affordable health care for all is fundamental to demonstrating respect for the life and upholding the dignity of every person from conception to natural death. It is imperative for leaders to address this essential moral principle and seek to provide for those left behind in our current health care system. How to do so is one of prudential judgment best left to the laity expert in health care, finance and government. Those of us who are privileged to have access should thank God for you who provide it.

Health care today is a business, and a special interest, a regulatory target and a political football. At this Mass we put all that aside. Rather we focus on the human dimension of health care. We pray for and with all who day after day perform the miraculous treatments and the tedious tasks to help restore, maintain, and cope with the physical, psychological and emotional needs of others. We include your spouses and families in our prayer. They sacrifice to allow you to do your good work.

Compassion and patience also describe the healing professions. This may come as a surprise to you, but not everyone is a good patient. Even more astounding I am sure is the truth that not everyone follows your advice. Surely the temptation comes on occasion to say – if only you had listened life would be easier today. Yet you graciously receive people where they are and treat them with kindness as best as you can.

While there are many fulfilling moments, healings and recoveries, hopes restored and lives saved. The ‘everydayness’ I know has its challenges. Those times when treatments do not work, those times when you must share the hard realities, those times when family disputes intrude, those times when fear, especially in children, complicates, those times when unrealistic expectations are acted out upon you, those times when impatience is wearing and weariness pays a visit, and especially those times when accidents and other tragedies tear at the heart. Through them all you are there with compassion and patience.

A new priest visited a lady who was to undergo brain surgery the next morning. He did not know what to say, words so often are inadequate. So he told her that he would pray for her during the time of her operation. She thanked him and expressed appreciation. Then she said, “Pray also for the doctors and nurses and all the other staff. If I die they will think they have failed. They will not have. They would have done the best they could do and that is enough. And I hopefully would be in route to see God face to face.” You too need affirmation and a tender touch once in a while. We do so today.

There are also the beautiful moments of healing, of hope, of joy. Those times when the answer seemed unknown and you took a leap of faith and good came from it. There is another Peanuts cartoon where Lucy is sitting at the stand with the sign ‘the doctor is in.’ Charlie Brown comes by. He says, “Everything seems hopeless, I’m completely depressed.” Lucy responds, “go home and eat a jelly bread sandwich folded over, five cents, please.” Then she says, “There are some cures you don’t learn in medical school.” You know that and share that.

You are called to follow the healing example of Christ who considered the whole person. By both reason and faith, we know that we are to do all we can to protect life from conception to natural death and all the years in-between. We are to be prudent stewards of our own bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and we are to be present to others in their physical and spiritual need.

Pope Francis recently spoke to an international conference of Catholic Medical Associations. He said:

“The first right of a human being is his life. In a frail human being, one is invited to recognize the face of Christ, who in his human flesh experienced the indifference and solitude to which we so often condemn the poorest of the poor, whether in developing countries or in wealthy societies. Every child who rather than being born is condemned unjustly to being aborted bears the face of Jesus Christ, bears the face of the Lord, who even before he was born and then just after his birth experienced the world’s rejection. And every elderly person even if he is ill or at the end of his days bears the face of Christ. They cannot be discarded, as the culture of waste suggests. They cannot be thrown away.”<sup>1</sup>

You in the healing ministry, the health care professions, are on the front lines to assure the respect and dignity for all persons. That is why the protection of religious liberty and freedom of conscience are so important, so you can do your jobs with freedom and in ethical ways, and so we can support you.

Pope Francis concluded with these words:

“(n)ot as a matter of faith, but as a matter of reason, as a matter of science: there is no human life more sacred than another, just as there is no human life qualitatively more significant than another. The credibility of a healthcare system is not measured solely by efficiency, but above all by the attention and love given to the person whose life is always sacred and inviolable. Never fail to ask the Lord and the Virgin Mary for the strength to accomplish your work well and to bear witness courageously to the Gospel of life.”<sup>1</sup>

I echo those words for in you we also see the face of Christ. Thank you for your sacrifices, your commitment, your professionalism, your compassion, your patience and your love. May St. Luke patron of health care and health care providers pray for you. And may Mary, the Mother of Life, watch over you all.

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<sup>1</sup> – Pope Francis, Address to International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, September 20, 2013