

## **Annual World Day of the Sick Mass---Diocesan Observance**

February 4, 2015 12:00 Noon Borgess Hospital/Lawrence Center

*Readings: Is.53:1-5,10-11; Heb. 12:5-7,11-13; Mk. 1:40-45*

We welcome all who are able to be present for this annual Mass. We look forward to this celebration of the World Day of the Sick every year, which is always celebrated on February 11<sup>th</sup> each year in conjunction with the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Here in our Diocese, we have moved our observance up a week, and this year we celebrate this event in an extra special way as we continue the joyful celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of Borgess Catholic Hospital here in our Diocese, and in these days of new beginnings with the leadership of Borgess' new CEO, Kathy Young.

From the earliest days 125 years ago when those first 11 Sisters of St. Joseph arrived from New York at Father O'Brien's invitation to provide Catholic healthcare here in this community, through the growth and development of Borgess into the fine, state-of-the-art health care institution it has become, and surely, with confidence in the ways Borgess will continue to grow, develop, and adapt to the more and more complex health care environment we are experiencing in our society, and to the changing health care needs taking place in our society---Past, Present and Future---Borgess continues to respond from a faith perspective with medical competence to the Healing Ministry entrusted into our care by God Himself.

God's Holy Word is full of many references to how our God wants to save us, heal us, and make us whole. And of course an essential part of Jesus' ministry in this world was that of bringing healing---physical, emotional and spiritual---to those in need. But Scripture goes even further than God wanting to heal us from our suffering. Our God has revealed Himself to be One with us to a far greater degree than standing on the sidelines of our human existence and occasionally "healing" us from our suffering.

It was from the Prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament that we learned about Who we have come to know as "the Suffering Servant." We heard about that "Suffering Servant" in today's First Reading: *"He was spurned and avoided by people, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity, one of those from whom people hide their faces, spurned, and we held him in no esteem."* That is God's Servant---far more than standing on the sidelines; He is one Who is right in there with us, in the midst of the joys and the sufferings of life. That Reading goes on:

*“Yet it was OUR infirmities that he bore, OUR suffering that he endured...pierced for OUR offenses, crushed for OUR sins.”*

Of course, as we know, the Old Testament image of the “Suffering Servant” is the One who prefigures Jesus Himself. In the fullness of time, God sent His only-begotten Son, to save the world. Jesus’ ministry was one of teaching God’s Word, preaching the Good News of how God wants us to live so that we can find true and lasting happiness, and healing people from what took away their human dignity. Teaching, Preaching, Forgiving sin, and Healing from spiritual/emotional/physical sickness---that is the essence of Jesus’ mission. But once again, Jesus saved us from our suffering by entering fully into our suffering. It was through His suffering, death, and resurrection that brought the world salvation from sin and any other power over the full dignity of the human person.

In today’s Gospel Reading, we heard about the encounter between Jesus and the man suffering from leprosy. The man said: *“If you wish, you can make me clean.”* And Jesus’ response was (not exactly in these words), “Are you kidding Me---if I wish?---Of course that’s what I want---Be made clean!” That’s God’s attitude toward anything that keeps us as human beings from living in the perfection that God originally made the first human persons---Adam and Eve---to live in. God does not WILL sin and suffering. God (as the Scriptures tell us) hates death. God abhors separation from Him due to sin. That’s why God sent His Son Jesus to reconcile us to Him, and in the process, to destroy the ultimate power of sin and death over us human beings.

And so that is why those of you who are in the medical field---those who are doctors, nurses, technicians, and researchers; those of you who give of your time and talents to help relieve suffering---those who are caregivers, volunteers, health care workers; those of you who devote your ministry to health care and the healing professions---Sisters, deacons, chaplains, lay Eucharistic ministers and visitors---that is why your professions and your work carries on the ministry of Jesus and the healing ministry of the Church.

In Pope Francis’ message for this World Day of the Sick, he says that “those who are sensitive to the sufferings of their brothers and sisters...see in them the image of God.” He goes on to say: “Those who are close to the sick who are in need of constant care and help in washing, dressing and eating....are on the path of sanctification.”

Whether you are a medical professional who gets paid to do that, or a family member who does that out of your familial love, the very act of caring for another human being who is ill is the work that helps us to grow in holiness.

A very dear friend of mine just died last week after a long illness. It was so inspiring to watch the loving care that was provided throughout his illness by his family members: his wife, his daughter (with whom they were living) and her three daughters, Jim's granddaughters. There was never a question about caring for him; they did it selflessly and constantly because of their absolute love for their husband/father/grandfather. They were also blessed with the service of an amazing Hospice company who treated Jim with great dignity and respect at all times. It was truly an example of loving ministry.

Pope Francis also talks from a sick person's perspective about how valued that person feels---how loved they know they are---when in spite of their suffering, they feel the care of another person who is caring for them. Just yesterday I went to another hospital to visit the young son of one of our diocesan staff; Aaron, just six years old, is in the pediatric intensive care and is very sick and scared. When I walked into the room, his mother was stretched out of her chair, cuddling/holding her little son to soothe him and calm his fears. It was clear that her loving presence was the best medicine of all.

Pope Francis says: "People immersed in the mystery of suffering and pain, when they accept these in faith, can themselves become living witnesses of a faith capable of embracing suffering, even without being able to understand its full meaning."

And so today, on this World Day of the Sick, we give thanks for Borgess, a fine, faith-based, Catholic Hospital for all that it has done in the **past** 125 years, and all that it **is** doing and **will do** for another 125 years

We pray for all those who are sick---those of you here with us for Mass, those in this hospital, and all those who are sick throughout our Diocese. And we also pray for all those who care for the sick---doctors, nurses, medical staff and administration, volunteers, and all care givers.

Let us conclude with the the prayerful words of Pope Francis: "O Mary, Seat of Wisdom, intercede as our Mother for all the sick and for those who care for them. Grant that, through the service of our suffering neighbors, and through the experience of suffering itself, may we receive and cultivate true wisdom of heart."