

“The Primacy of the Spiritual and the Interconnectedness of All of Society”
Homily for the Annual White Mass – Mass for the Promotion of Charity
October 16, 2020; St. Augustine Church
Readings: Rom 12:3-13; Ps 85; Jn15:12-17

Introduction

For our “White Mass” this year, we are celebrating the Mass for Families and Relatives. It is one of the Masses for special needs and occasions given in the Roman Missal. The Lectionary for Mass also has a special corresponding section for Masses for needs and occasions, and it usually has several readings to choose from among Old Testament options, New Testament options, and the Gospel. For this one, though (Mass for Families and Relatives), there is only one New Testament reading in the Lectionary, and it just so happened to be the one in which St. Paul uses the analogy of the human body. I cannot think of a more appropriate Scripture passage for a Mass with a group of medical professionals than the analogy from the human body!

One Body in Christ

You are medical professionals, so you know better than I that the body is all interconnected, and so a problem in one part of the body can be felt in another part of the body. You know how that all works; I just know that there are strange phenomena to us laymen (in your profession, I am a layman, right?). If you have a pain in your back, and then you have a bad cough, you can feel it in your back. It is all interconnected.

And so St. Paul says that we are one Body in Christ. We are parts of a body interconnected to each other – he uses this image for our communion. But let us pay close attention to what he says: “We ... are one Body in Christ.” He does not say, “We are the Body of Christ,” rather, we are “one Body *in* Christ.”

We share a communion in Christ and are under him. He is the head of the Body. So if I may extrapolate a bit on St. Paul’s use of the body as an analogy, it is the role of the head (the brain) in the body to give orders to the other parts of the body (as I understand it; isn’t that correct?). The brain gives orders to other parts of the body and receives information from the other parts of the body and processes it. And so it is with Christ as the head of the Church: we send our prayers up to him, he processes them, and then gives orders back to us.

Friends of Christ

He gives us orders, though, not to make us slaves! He says something quite different in the Gospel reading for this Mass: “You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves... I have called you friends.” And so he gives us orders (his commandments) in order to give us an opportunity to be his friends.

So we are more than body parts! We are loved by him, and we can know him and love him in return with the love of friendship. But we can do so only if we maintain this communion in him in his Church and under him as our head. This is how we bear fruit – bearing fruit comes from our status with him as friends.

This is why what we are doing here this evening is so important – spiritual support and growth for Catholic health care workers. As the body is all interconnected, as the Church is all interconnected, so is society as a whole. We have seen this interconnectedness in the distress of the current pandemic – physical health and economic health affect the health of social life. Above all, what is important in a society is spiritual health.

Primacy of the Spiritual

We must give primacy to the spiritual in order for our society to be healthy because how we relate to one other, how we fulfill the duties of our state in life, how live our vocation – all that comes from where we are in our spiritual state. So we need to continue to exercise our most sublime duty as human beings in giving worship to God. We need to do so in a safe way, but we need to make sure *that* we do so.

To bear fruit means that the fruit has to be borne in the communities where we live our everyday lives. For the majority of people, this will be most notably in the family and workplace and, for some, in the school. This is where we show we are his friends. This is where we bear fruit by doing what he commands us to do.

And what does he command us to do? “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” This is what a Christian society looks like – all living this in accordance with their vocation and state in life. It applies to everyone. I think at this time of health care workers, especially early on in the crisis of the pandemic, who worked themselves to exhaustion, at risk to their own health and even their own lives in this pandemic. Some few have even died. As de-Christianized as our society has become, we still see this happening. This tells me we still have the last vestiges of what was once a society imbued with Judeo-Christian values. This is what a Christian society looks like.

Catholic Medical Association

This is why I am so thankful to you for your commitment to living your faith in your workplace. Your workplace – the field of health care – is one of most privileged places where values of our faith can affect people on such a deep level. You understand this. You understand that your role is not only to improve the quality of your patients’ life in this world, but above all to help them improve the quality of their life everlasting.

Conclusion

Thank you for forming this chapter of the Catholic Medical Association here in our Archdiocese. I am so appreciative of the vision of your founders. It is something that I have been desiring and envisioning for many years, and, seeing the great need here in our Archdiocese, given what a great center of health care and health care research we are, we need to imbue this vocation, this endeavor of health care and health care research, with the values that come from the Gospel. Otherwise, what is quintessentially a Christian work can devolve into something that can be harmful in different ways.

Homily, White Mass (2020)

I pray that this chapter may multiply abundantly with friends of our Lord who will bear fruit for him: fruit for the physical and mental health of their patients, fruit for the spiritual health of our society, and, above all, fruit of life in God's Kingdom – that life which does not fade, does not grow sick or wither, but is the light, peace and communion with God which endures for all eternity.