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The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Jesus counters our indifference with his compassion

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to be salt and light for the world—salt to overcome apathy, light to shine in the darkness.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Jesus is his compassion. Our Lord cares about us. He is never indifferent to the suffering of others, and frequently, he is moved with pity; his heart aches for the poor, for those who are afflicted with physical and mental diseases, and even for



sinners. There is no apathy in Jesus. He cares deeply about everyone, and he doesn't keep his compassion to himself. He acts—to feed the hungry, to cure the sick and to forgive sins. We might say that Jesus' compassion is what makes him stand out. He is a shining light on our world's darkness because he cares so deeply. He is like salt—an essential preservative in the days before refrigeration as well as a condiment that enhances flavor—because he brings out the best in us no matter how badly we have been spoiled by our selfishness and sin.

Sacred Scripture admonishes us: “Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; clothe the naked when you see them, and do not turn your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!” (Is 58:7-9) This is the Golden Rule: We must treat others as we wish to be treated.

If we care about others, our own needs will be met. If we selfishly refuse to help our sisters and brothers in need, we become insipid, like salt that has lost its power. As Jesus teaches, “You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot” (Mt 5:13).

Our indifference causes us to become uncaring, no longer able to help others in their time of need. Jesus counters our indifference with his compassion, his ability to “suffer with” his brothers and sisters. Where we are paralyzed by apathy, Jesus never turns his back on his own.

“You are the light of the world,” Jesus tells us. “A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (Mt 5:14-16).

In our indifference, we hide under cover of darkness. We fail to act as Jesus demands, and we deny the truth about ourselves. Instead of acting with care and compassion, we timidly hold back telling ourselves that someone else will do what we are too afraid to do: care for the least of these sisters and brothers of Jesus.

In his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 2:1-5), St. Paul acknowledges that we cannot do what our Lord commands by our own power. It is the Holy Spirit who makes us bolder than we are by ourselves and who gives us the power we need to act on behalf of others. “I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling,” St. Paul teaches us, “and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of Spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God ” (1 Cor 2:3-5).

To overcome our indifference and to become salt and light for the world, we must surrender our egos and allow the grace of God to empower and enlighten us. Let’s pray for the “weakness, fear and trembling” that brings us to our knees and allows us to let the Holy Spirit do what we are too proud, frightened or indifferent to do: care deeply for our brothers and sisters in need.

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A Selection from: Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, Fifth Edition, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Church has always sought to embody our Savior’s concern for the sick. The gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry draw special attention to his acts of healing: he cleansed a man with leprosy (Mt 8:1-4; Mk 1:40-42); he gave sight to two people who were blind (Mt 20:29-34; Mk 10:46-52); he enabled one who was mute to speak (Lk 11:14); he cured a woman who

was hemorrhaging (Mt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34); and he brought a young girl back to life (Mt 9:18, 23-25;



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Mk 5:35-42). Indeed, the Gospels are replete with examples of how the Lord cured every kind of ailment and disease (Mt 9:35). In the account of Matthew, Jesus' mission fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "He took away our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Mt 8:17; cf. Is 53:4).

Jesus' healing mission went further than caring only for physical affliction. He touched people at the deepest level of their existence; he sought their physical, mental, and spiritual healing (Jn 6:35, 11:25-27). He "came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

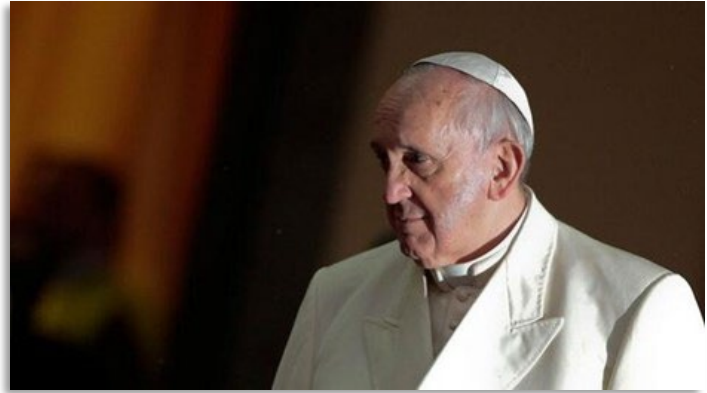
The mystery of Christ casts light on every facet of Catholic health care: to see Christian love as the animating principle of health care; to see healing and compassion as a continuation of Christ's mission; to see suffering as a participation in the redemptive power of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection; and to see death, transformed by the resurrection, as an opportunity for a final act of communion with Christ.

For the Christian, our encounter with suffering and death can take on a positive and distinctive meaning through the redemptive power of Jesus' suffering and death. As St. Paul says, we are "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body" (2 Cor 4:10). This truth does not lessen the pain and fear, but gives confidence and grace for bearing suffering rather than being overwhelmed by it. Catholic health care ministry bears witness to the truth that, for those who are in Christ, suffering and death are the birth pangs of the new creation. "God himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away" (Rev 21:3-4).

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A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

When individuals experience frailty and suffering in their own flesh as a result of illness, their hearts become heavy, fear spreads, uncertainties multiply, and questions about the meaning of what is happening in their lives become all the more urgent. How can we forget, in this regard, all those patients who, during this time of pandemic spent the last part of their earthly life in solitude, in an intensive care unit, assisted by generous healthcare workers, yet far from their loved ones and the most important people in their lives? This helps us to see how important is the presence at our side of witnesses to God's charity, who, following the example of Jesus, the very mercy of the Father, pour the balm of consolation and the wine of hope on the wounds of the sick.



Patients are always more important than their diseases, and for this reason, no therapeutic approach can prescind from listening to the patient, his or her history, anxieties and fears. Even when healing is not possible, care can always be given. It is always possible to console, it is always possible to make people sense a closeness that is more interested in the person than in his or her pathology.

(Selected from Pope Francis's 2022 World Day of the Sick Message)

My Prayer for You

Let's join with Pope Francis in offering this prayer for all who are suffering from any illness:

Dear brothers and sisters, to the intercession of Mary, Health of the Infirm, I entrust all the sick and their families. United with Christ, who bears the pain of the world, may they find meaning, consolation and trust. I pray for healthcare workers everywhere, that, rich in mercy, they may offer patients, together with suitable care, their fraternal closeness.

+ Charles C. Thompson