



Most Rev. James D. Conley, S.T.L.

Homilies

Auxiliary Bishop of Denver

HOMILY: annual White Mass (2009)

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Denver, CO (Oct. 18, 2009)

First of all, I would like to welcome everyone this afternoon to the Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception for this 12:30 p.m. Mass. And in a particular way I would like to welcome all of you who are in the health care profession: physicians, physician assistants, nurses of every kind, paramedics, dentists, pharmacists, hospital administrators, psychologists and all those who are associated in any way with health care and the healing arts. On behalf of Archbishop Chaput, Msgr. Fryar, Fr. Voss, and the "Denver Guild of the Catholic Medical Association" I would like to welcome you and thank you for your response to God's call to serve our brothers and sisters who are in need due to illness or any other health issues. It is a joy for me. I'm glad you are here.

Today's Mass is called the Annual White Mass for those of you who just happened to show up at the 12:30 p.m. Sunday Mass here at the Cathedral.

Every year the Archdiocese of Denver sponsors a special Mass to honor all the health care workers and those associates with health care on a Sunday in October closest to the feast day of St. Luke, the patron of physicians, which is celebrated on October 18. This year St. Luke's feast day happens to fall on a Sunday – today! Liturgically, St. Luke gets bumped and the Sunday liturgy takes precedence!

Last Sunday we celebrated the Annual Red Mass to honor those who are in the law profession, lawyers, judges, and politicians in honor of St. Thomas More. Back in September we celebrated the Annual Blue Mass for those entrusted with our public safety, law enforcement, fire fighters, and first responders. It is a wonderful way to honor those who are called by God to serve all of us in so many different and necessary capacities and duties and to pray with you and support you.

The White Mass is "white" (I suppose) because of the professional white coats so many of you wear.

St. Luke is the patron saint of physicians as St. Paul describes him in Chapter 4 of his letter to the Colossians: "Luke, the beloved physician" (Col. 4:1). It is believed that Luke was born a Greek and a gentile, the only non-Jew of the four gospel writers. He is also the patron saint of artists – perhaps because he had the skilled hands and eye of a surgeon.

It is only in Luke's gospel that we hear the story of the "Good Samaritan" -- the story of compassion for the man who is injured on the side of the road. Perhaps it was Luke's vocation as a physician that particularly moved him to recount this parable spoken by Jesus. It is also only in Luke's gospel that we hear about the one "grateful leper" who was healed and returned to give thanks to Jesus.

St. Luke recounts six of Jesus' healings in his gospel and it is interesting that, not unlike the other gospel writers, more emphasis is put on the faith of the one being healed than the fact of the healing.

I would venture to guess that those of you who work, day in and day out, with people who are suffering from various illnesses and health issues, realize that life is a gift from God. And we are only stewards of that gift of life. Our faith teaches us it is only God who can create and sustain life!

Those of you who are trained in the healing arts are skilled professionals. Through your knowledge and expertise you possess special gifts of healing. For this we honor you and thank you for your

service to us.

But I also believe, as I mentioned earlier, that all of you who serve in the medical profession have a sacred vocation. You have been called by Christ to serve your brothers and sisters in need, to relieve their suffering, to ease their pain, to help bring them back to full health.

But as Catholics, as believers in Christ, your vocation of healing comes from Jesus Christ himself, the one Divine Physician.

As Archbishop Chaput put it the other night in Phoenix in his words to the Catholic Physicians Guild in Phoenix, Arizona:

“Your vocation of healing comes from Jesus Christ himself. I don’t mean just curing peoples’ aches and pains, although physical healing is so very important. I mean the kind of healing that comes when a suffering person is understood and loved, and knows that he or she is understood and loved. That requires a different kind of medicine. The medicine of patience. The medicine of listening. The medicine of respect.”

As Pope Benedict XVI said so beautifully in his most recent encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, Love in Truth, “everyone deserves to love and be loved.”

This is what the Bishops mean about everyone deserves health care. Everyone deserves to be loved and taken care of by our society, no matter how poor or dependent they may be, just like we protect everyone with law enforcement, from fires and other dangers to life. Everyone deserves to be loved and cared for by society.

But, as Pope Benedict XVI said so beautifully in his encyclical: love without truth is mere sentimentality and emotionalism and truth without love is merely a cold set of hard rules.

This is why we, as Catholics, must insist that in any health care reform package, the truth about the human person must be recognized. For example, abortion, the killing of an unborn child in the womb, at any stage of his or her development is not health care and cannot be a part of health care reform. As Blessed Mother Teresa used to always say, “if a government sanctions the killing of the unborn children, what else can they do?” History has taught us that there are no limits to human depravity.

The current legislation being debated in Congress regarding universal health care reform is a moving target. We don’t know what is going to come out of that process.

We have been promised by our President that it will respect the consciences not just of health care workers like you, but of all taxpayers who don’t want to see their money spent for abortion, and we need to hold our President to his word!

In the end, the U.S. Bishops have two goals. Everyone should be loved and taken care of and no one should be deliberately killed. It is up to the politicians, the lawyers and legislators to see what mechanism will make that happen. It is very complicated and the people in Congress are following it step by step, day in and day out, and it keeps shifting, the ground keeps shifting as you talk, so you have to meet each shift as it comes.

In reality, to be honest, we remain apprehensive and skeptical when amendments protecting freedom of conscience and ensuring no taxpayer money for abortion are defeated in committee votes. And the bottom line: if acceptable language in these areas cannot be found, we as Catholics must, in conscience, oppose the health care bill vigorously with all the resources we have.

In the words of USCCB in its most recent letter dated October 8, 2009 to the members of Congress, we bishops wrote:

“Catholic moral tradition teaches that health care is a basic human right, essential to protecting human life and dignity. Much-needed reform of our health care system must be pursued in ways that serve the life and dignity of all, never in ways that undermine or violate these fundamental values. We will work tirelessly to remedy these central problems and help pass real reform that clearly protects the life, dignity and health of all.”

In conclusion, once again we thank you and honor you who have been called by God to serve our brothers and sisters in need in the health care profession.

We stand with you in solidarity with our prayers and moral support for you and your families who often times share the burden of your service by their sacrifice of time and family support.

May the intercession of St. Luke and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Prompt Succor (good health), give you the strength and power of the Divine Physician, Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life!