

**Homily for Mass Celebrating National Hospital Week
St. John's Hospital
Springfield, Illinois
May 9, 2011**

**+ Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As your Diocesan Bishop it is a privilege and a joy for me to be here with you to celebrate the Holy Mass as part of your celebrations of this National Hospital Week. I greet especially those participating in this Mass from their rooms in this hospital.

I come from a family of pharmacists. My grandfather started Paprocki Pharmacy in 1919. His brother had a drug store. My Dad took over the family pharmacy when his father died in 1947. My Dad's brother also had his own drug store, I have two brothers in the pharmacy business and one of my nieces is now a registered pharmacist. I started my career in healthcare when I was in sixth grade, working behind the candy counter in our family pharmacy. I worked part-time in our drug store throughout my years in the seminary. I also had summer jobs at a wholesale drug company and at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago. While I was in the seminary I did internships as a hospital chaplain at Alexian Brothers

Medical Center in Elk Grove Village, Illinois, and at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, Texas. My graduate thesis in theology was in medical ethics. When I was Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, I served as the Cardinal's Liaison for Health and Hospital Affairs and I currently serve as a Member of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Task Force on Health Care, so I have more than a passing interest in the subject health care.

The importance of hospitals in society cannot be denied and neither can the influence of faithful Catholics in their growth through the centuries. Although the purpose of hospitals has changed somewhat with the passage of time (some were established to serve orphans, others the elderly, others soldiers, etc.), their initial purpose remains.

The word "hospital" comes from the Latin *hospes*, which is one of those "janus words," technically called a contronym, that conveys opposite meanings in the same word. Thus, *hospes* means both "guest" and "host." Hence, a hospital is – first and foremost – a place where guests – be they strangers or friends – are welcomed and given hospitality by their hosts.

This work of welcoming those in need is part and parcel of the Christian life. Indeed, Saint Peter instructs us rather bluntly in this regard: "Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (I Peter 4:9). Saint Paul

likewise instructs us to “contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality” (Romans 12:9).

Clearly, then, part of this work of hospitality is meeting the needs of those who are welcomed in the name of Christ. Their physical needs must often first be met before their spiritual needs can be met. Many of these physical needs involve physical health which organically led to the formation of hospitals as we know them today, as places of bodily healing.

Your theme for this National Hospital Week is a fitting one: “Champions of Care.” Too often today we are tempted always to think first of ourselves, to see ourselves as these champions of care. No doubt, this is certainly what the administrative staff desires the various hospital employees do, to seek to become such champions for your patients. And, certainly, this should be your goal, but not in a self-seeking way but in way that leads to a growth in holiness and love.

Within the communion of saints, we see countless such champions of care. Today we can think particularly of Saints Cosmas and Damian, the twin brother physicians whose work – in sharp distinction of the medical work of others of their day – actually brought their patients healing. They lived in present-day Syria and accepted no money for their services, which

drew the attention of others and led many to become Christians. Their generous and loving service eventually won for them the martyrs' crown around the year 287.

We can think, too, of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary who, after the death of her husband Ludwig in 1227, sold her possessions to establish hospitals for the poor. Elizabeth was only twenty years of age then and she devoted the remainder of her life to the care of the poor. She died only four years later.

In our own country with think of Saint Damien of Moloka'i, whose memorial we will celebrate tomorrow. In his own day, Damien was known as the "hero of Moloka'i" and "the Leper Priest" because he, unlike all others, placed himself at great risk in his care of the lepers. After laboring among the lepers for ten years, Damien himself contracted the dreaded disease and died five years later in 1889.

In our own day, we can, of course, of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, whose life of humble love of the poorest of the poor radiated the love of Jesus Christ far and wide. It is the radiation of this love that is present in ever true champion of care.

Why is it that your patients choose a Catholic hospital for their medical care? It is surely not simply because you are here; it is surely not simply because of the quality care you provide for them; and it is surely not simply a flip of their coin.

Your patients choose this Catholic hospital dedicated to Saint John because, like the crowds in the Gospel passage we have just heard, your patients are “looking for Jesus” (John 6:24).

Jesus confronted the true desires of the crowds who sought him because he knew they were not seeking him for their salvation; rather, they sought him only because he multiplied the loaves and the fishes. They did not yet understand that their spiritual life is far more important and of greater concern than their physical life. Nevertheless, the two are not unrelated.

For this lack of understanding, Jesus reprimanded them. “Do not work for food that perishes,” he said to them, “but for the food that endures for eternal life” (John 6:27). This same message you must hand on to your patients.

Each of your patients comes to you seeking physical healing and restoration, perhaps without recognizing that they have also come seeking

the Lord. In this profound moment of encounter, you have a grace-filled opportunity to lead your patients ever deeper into the mysterious love of Jesus Christ.

You must always remember that your primary concern must always be to show each of your patients in every part of this hospital the love that Jesus Christ has personally for each one of them.

Let me now speak to the patients who are present with us. In your time of suffering, you must look to the cross of the Lord and see there the depth of his love for you. As you look upon the sufferings he endured for your salvation, you can join your own sufferings to his, to complete, as Saint Paul says, “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church” (Colossians 1:24).

The Lord desires to use your sufferings in his work of salvation. Seek, then, to unite yourself to him so that through you he might bless abundantly those who have grown lax in the practice of the faith, those who live in contradiction to the moral law written on their hearts and those who seek to hurt the followers of Christ.

In his message for this year’s World Day of the Sick, Pope Benedict said, “Dear sick and suffering, it is precisely through the wounds of Christ

that we are able to see, with eyes of hope, all the evils that afflict humanity. In rising again, the Lord did not remove suffering and evil from the world, but he defeated them at their root. He opposed the arrogance of Evil with the omnipotence of his Love. He has shown us, therefore, that the way of peace and joy is Love: 'Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another' (Jn 13:34). Christ, victor over death, is alive in our midst. And while with St. Thomas we also say 'My Lord and my God!', let us follow our Master in readiness to spend our lives for our brothers and sisters (cf. 1 Jn 3:16), becoming messengers of a joy that does not fear pain, the joy of the Resurrection."

As we celebrate this National Hospital Week, let each of us took to the example of the holy men and women made themselves servants of Christ by giving themselves to the poor and the ill, that we, with them, might become champions of care.

May God give us this grace. Amen.