

Diocesan Healthcare Convocation Mass**St. Viator Chapel at the Catholic Pastoral Center****May 10, 2017****† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is most fitting that we are here to celebrate the Diocesan Healthcare Convocation Mass on this, the feast of Saint Damien of Moloka'i. Saint Damien was a member of the Congregation of Picpus, a religious order comprised of missionary priests that primarily serve the needy and abandoned throughout the world. Initially part of a team of four priests that were assigned as chaplains serving a three-month term each year in the leper colony that was established by the Hawaiian government on the Island of Moloka'i, Damien requested to stay permanently in the colony to care for the spiritual, physical, and medical needs of its residents. Throughout his years serving the members of the colony Damien was a constant source of consolation and encouragement to his flock through his loving care as well as advocacy on their behalf. During his ministry to the people in the settlement Damien contracted Hansen's Disease and in 1889, after sixteen

years of service to the patients with leprosy, Damien died of its complications.

Just a few moments ago in today's reading from the Gospel of Saint John we hear our Lord cry out:

Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me sees the one who sent me. I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness. And if anyone hears my words and does not observe them, I do not condemn him, for I did not come to condemn the world but to save the world.

It should be evident to all of us that Saint Damien lived out his priestly ministry in a way that mirrors our Lord's teaching in this gospel. To the people of the leper colony, Saint Damien reflected the light of Christ in the midst of their darkness through his preaching of the Gospel and care of their spiritual needs as well as their physical and emotional needs.

As members of the healthcare community, you are afforded many opportunities to serve healthcare needs of the people of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois by your work. I know that on a day-to-day basis it is easy to get caught up in all that we have going on and the work that we need to accomplish, but it is important that in the very important work that

you do, you should seek, like Saint Damien did, to strive to mirror the light of Christ to the people you serve. While the majority of your time is spent tending to their physical needs, never lose sight of the fact that each and every person that you care for also has emotional and spiritual needs that may need healing as well. As a matter of fact, your spiritual care is just as important, if not more important, to that person as the medical care that you provide.

It is my hope that the Lord will give you the grace that you need in your lives to carry out your work in a way that builds up the kingdom of God. May all of those whom you encounter see not only you, but also the reflection of God through you.

May God give us this grace. Amen.