

**Homily for the Diocesan White Mass
Vigil of the Feast of Saint Luke**

October 17, 2018

**Saint Francis Conventual Church at the Chiara Center
Springfield, Illinois**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Father(s), Deacons, consecrated religious, members of the healthcare profession, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good for us to be here at this church dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi as we gather to celebrate the annual White Mass for the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois on this eve of the feast of the Evangelist, Saint Luke. In addition to being the author of the Gospel that bears his name and the *Acts of the Apostles*, tradition holds that Saint Luke was a physician, so it is fitting that we seek his intercession for God's blessings on all healthcare professionals.

We know from our first reading that Saint Luke was a companion of Saint Paul, which put him in the company of the Apostle to the Gentiles. In the passage we have today from the tenth chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel, we hear our Lord's commission to the seventy-two disciples as he sent them out with the instruction to "cure the sick and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.'"

The juxtaposition of these two commands is significant. Jesus gave the same instruction to all the disciples, telling them to cure the sick and proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand. He did not break them up into two distinct groups and say to one group, “You are the health care professionals; go out and cure the sick,” and then say to the other group, “You are the ministers of religion; go out and proclaim the Kingdom of God.” He did send them out in pairs, so perhaps in each pair there was one person more skilled at curing the sick and the other more eloquent in proclaiming the Gospel. Either way, they were to work together, and not see their tasks as separated from each other.

The same is true for us today in our work of caring for the sick. Each of you has particular skills and areas of expertise in the fields of medicine and nursing. Some of us have more education in theology and experience in pastoral care. But we cannot lock ourselves in isolated silos oblivious or indifferent to what our colleagues are doing. Medical professionals cannot simply say to the Church that proclaiming the Gospel is your job, so leave me out of those religious matters, nor can the Church say to medical professionals that healthcare is your responsibility, so we are not interested or willing to sponsor the work of Catholic health care institutions. Our

efforts must be collaborative and holistic, working together to care for the physical and spiritual well-being of the whole human person, body and soul, mind and heart.

Saint Luke was a doctor, born of a noble pagan family, who converted to the faith in the year 40 and later accompanied Saint Paul on his second apostolic journey. We are told that Saint Luke excelled in all that he did, whether it was attending to the sick, writing his Gospel and the *Acts of the Apostles*, or painting pictures of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

As in all work done well, the inspired writing of Sacred Scripture required human effort. The help of God does not supplant human talent. Luke himself refers to the diligence of the task. *After following up all things carefully from the very first he made an orderly account* (cf. Luke 1:3). He indicates, too, that the information is in keeping with the testimony of those *who were eyewitnesses from the beginning* (Luke 1:2). The task of composition meant assiduously interviewing firsthand observers, most probably Our Lady herself, the Apostles and the protagonists of the miracles who were still alive. St. Jerome observes of his finely wrought style that it is a reflection of the reliability of his sources.

Thanks to Luke's attentive correspondence with the grace of the Holy Spirit, today we can read an account of Jesus' infancy and the series of superb parables that he alone recounts. We

recall the parable of the good Samaritan, the other about the negligent administrator, and of course the episode about poor Lazarus and the rich man. Also unique to his Gospel is the wonderful account of the two travelers to Emmaus. It is exquisitely crafted down to the last detail.

St. Luke also describes the divine mercy shown to those most in need as no other Evangelist does. He stresses Christ's love for sinners to show that Jesus came to *save those who were lost* (7:36-50).¹

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Living as a Christian in the world can be a real challenge. People often feel lost. When sickness strikes, we feel alone; in financial troubles, we are nervous; with broken relationships, we feel abandoned. During such moments, we are called to be like Saint Luke and stand by those who feel lost and cannot find their way. In these moments, we are a hand that reaches out to rescue those who are drowning in a sea of despair. With the help of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, we are hope for the helpless and refreshment for the weak.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Francis Fernandez, *In Conversation with God: Daily Meditations, Volume Seven: Special Feasts: July-December* (London—New York: Scepter1991), pp. 235-236.