Homily for White Mass

Praised be Jesus Christ! Now and Forever! My brothers and sisters in the Lord it is good to be with you today as we gather to celebrate the Eucharist and at the same time focus our attention on the men and women involved in the care of the sick and infirm in our community. As we gather as a Christian Community we pray for all you involved in the healthcare apostolate asking God to be with you in your work and that you may be filled with the compassionate love of Jesus so that through your hands the Lord may embrace His people in love.

As we listen to God’s word in Scripture today we see that the Lord is asking us to evaluate how we are living out the Gospel values that call us to a deeper understanding of the reality of life over against those who are focused merely on the things of this world. In the gospel Jesus suggest that perhaps we are not as energetic or shrewd in promoting the Kingdom of God and the Gospel values that make up the Kingdom as are those who have their hearts set on the things of this world.

The parable of the unjust steward is difficult to understand because it appears that Jesus is commending an action that is wrong. The steward appears to be cheating his master for his own ends. However, if we look closer we see that the Lord is not condoning the action of the unjust steward but rather commending him for taking action based upon the concrete reality of his state in life. He recognizes the precarious nature of his situation and thus he works to better his position.

The Lord asks us in the same way to understand and evaluate how we are living our lives and to work to ensure a secure future for ourselves. We do this when we come to know the truth of life that is taught to us by Jesus and to live as His disciples here and now. The Lord invites us to share in His own divine life and to base our behavior and activity in this world always focused on the Kingdom of God that is coming about. That Kingdom is one based on love, compassion, mercy and peace. It is a Kingdom in which God is recognized as the source and fount of all life and who holds all creation in His hand. It is a kingdom in which God invites us to grow first and foremost in our knowledge and love of Him and then to grow in our knowledge and love of all that He has created and continues to create for the benefit of each one of us.

As members of the healthcare community, you my brothers and sisters, have a special role to play in the work of building up and caring for God’s people. As doctors and physicians it is important that you grow daily in your respect for human life as God created it and designed it. You must promote in your profession a deep respect not simply for the science behind human life but also the will of the Creator in terms of our approach to human life. As Catholic
physicians and healthcare providers you must always keep in mind that human beings are composed of both a body and a soul. Human beings are not simply masses of tissue that are thrown together and operate on certain chemical reactions but are the loving creation of a God who calls us into life as a unique person endowed with a body and His own life giving breathe and spirit and who has made us with a set purpose and end that is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

We live in a society today that has become enamored of its own knowledge and abilities that are afforded us in this information and technological age. Our approach to this age of explosion in information must be both prudent and cautious. The danger is that we become so engrossed in our own ability that we lose sight of the One who holds all creation together by His will and His love. It is easy to lose sight of the loving God who created us and who actually designed the world and all its wonders and who invites us to probe His creation and to marvel at His magnificent work.

As doctors and healthcare professionals the Lord invites you to help care for His people and to use your knowledge and skill to assist the human person when they grow ill or weak. He asks that you see your role as helping the human body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, to carry out its proper functions and to use your intelligence to heal and assist this body when it fails to function as God intends. In doing so it is also important to keep in mind that human life is not the ultimate good. As Christians we know clearly that human life is terminal. We know, through God's revelation, that the goal of all life is union with God for all eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is very important that you approach your work with the deepest respect for what God has done and that you cultivate for yourselves a deep relationship with the Lord who is able to assist you in your important work. In this light I urge you as St. Paul does in our second reading for this liturgy to be people of prayer. St. Paul encourages us to pray with open hands to the Lord who will never be wanting to our needs. As physicians and healthcare professionals I suggest that prayer will help you to perform your duties and responsibilities in a manner that is imbued not simply with human compassion for those you care for but with a much deeper love and affection that comes from the very heart of God. I also suggest that in those difficult moments when our human intelligence seems to have hit a roadblock in the direction we need to take in treating those entrusted to our care that we have a Divine Physician who is an expert in all things and whom we can approach for His guidance and assistance.

In that vein I am reminded of a wonderful physician that I had the privilege to know when I was a priest in Philadelphia. He was a good doctor and an outstanding physician. He was also a man of deep faith. As a matter of fact toward the end of his career as a doctor he became a
permanent deacon in the Church so that he could attend not only to the physical needs of his patients but also nourish them spiritually so that he could treat the whole person.

I got to know him very well because he was Cardinal Krol’s physician and I was the Cardinal’s secretary. At the end of his life the Cardinal had many physical ailments and thus made many trips to the hospital. On this one occasion the Cardinal had become very ill and was rushed to the intensive care unit of one of our Catholic hospitals. All sorts of test were done and this Doctor was doing all that he could to determine the source of the illness and the treatment that was needed. At the end of a long day I had the opportunity to sit with the Doctor and talk about his work. He gave me an insight into the practice of medicine that I have never forgotten. He told me that if one really contemplates the practice of medicine it is all about discovery. He said even in its terminology we say that we “discover” the cure for polio. We discover the cure for tuberculosis. He said that medicine really is about discovering how God has put the magnificent human body together. For this doctor it was discovering the very mind of God. He went on to ask me a question that has fascinated me to this day. He explained that all those in the hospital were working very hard to address the Cardinal’s illness. However, he asked me what did I think was the most aggressive thing a doctor could do in trying to heal his patient. I thought about it and I said I guess after doing all you could you might try some experimental drugs. He said that is what many think but he said the most aggressive thing a doctor can do in treating a patient is to do nothing. He went on to say that sometimes if one rushes too quickly to treat an illness he may wind up treating a symptom and not the disease. Thus sometimes a doctor just has to wait to see what is happening with the patient before jumping to a conclusion. He said in those moments it is good to have the opportunity to pray for the help of the Divine Physician that He may help us to see with His eyes what we may be being missing with the human eye.

My brothers and sisters as we continue our liturgy I want you to know how important your work is both for the Church and for all of society. It is not easy to be a Catholic physician or healthcare worker today. We live in an age where there is a loss of respect for human life from the moment of conception until natural death. We live in a utilitarian society where a person’s value is often based upon their production or on whether society thinks their life contributes any value to the human experience. We live in an age that is more focused on things and possessions than on the supreme value of each unique human person as a human person. We live in an age that runs away from pain and suffering and evaluates these things as something to be avoided at all costs.

We need the witness of your life to attest to the value of every human life and we need your hands and your heart to show the merciful compassion and love of the Lord for every person created in His image and likeness and deserving of the highest care possible.
The gospel reminds us that sometimes the people that have their sights set on the things of this world are more industrious and shrewd than are we who have been given the gift of the full knowledge of life that is to be found in the Kingdom.

Pray for me as I pray for you that we will work with all our strength to be the people God has called us to be and to proclaim the truth about life both by what we say and by the actions of our life each and every day.