

Homily for the Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Easter

National Nurses' Week May 6 to May 12, 2020

Bishop John O. Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

May 6, 2020

“National Nurses’ Week” begins each year on May 6th and ends on May 12th, the birthday of Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), the foundress of modern nursing.

As we begin our celebration of National Nurses’ Week today, I want to thank all our Catholic Health Services nurses, their families and their colleagues for their exceptional dedication and spirit of sacrifice as they compassionately serve the sick and suffering, live the Catholic mission expressed in our Catholic Health Services on Long Island, and continue their efforts to defeat COVID-19.

We pray in a special way at this Mass for you and your families, your colleagues and for all the people you serve with the compassion of the Risen Christ. We pray for all nurses on Long Island, around our country and throughout the World.

I so much appreciated the March 31, 2020 Wall Street Journal article entitled “Nurses Are the Coronavirus Heroes,” by Dr. Paul Dohrenwend. He captures the heroism, courage and prayerful attention to detail of our nurses.

Dr. Dohrenwend writes: “If you wonder who actually sticks the swabs into the noses of worried patients, it’s the nurses. They’re on the front line, face-to-face in the 6-foot danger zone. They are collecting the data that epidemiologists use to track the outbreak. Moving in and out of negative-pressure rooms, putting protective equipment on and taking it off, nurses are caring for elderly patients who are severely ill and sometimes crashing. The nurses marinate in risk as they spend the greatest amount of time with the patient. They draw blood, obtain samples, provide oxygen, and steadfastly tend to their patients’ needs. They are by

the doctors' side as we intubate patients struggling to breathe. Once that patient is transferred to the intensive-care unit, it's the nurses who do the mundane and the heroic to make sure the patient survives the illness or dies more comfortably...I thank everyone who's working to help get through this...Everyone is playing a part—but none are more important than the nurses.”

To our Catholic Health Services nurses and to nurses in every hospital and health care facility and context on Long Island: Know how much we all appreciate your dedicated work, your courage and your commitment to the sanctity of human life at every stage of life. It is a powerful and compelling witness for the common good.

In the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus says: “I came into the world as light, so that everyone who believes in me might not remain in darkness.”

Thank you to our nurses for the powerful way you reflect the Light of Christ to your patients and their families, and to everyone you serve so faithfully.

In the first reading from the twelfth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, we hear that “The Word of God continued to spread and grow.”

Nurses, your commitment to the Word of God is a Light and Lamp (Psalm 119) for your lives and is a Light and Lamp for the comfort, reassurance and support you offer your patients.

The Word of God continues “to spread and grow” because of your powerful moment-by-moment witness and the sanctification of your work grounded in the Word of God and a powerful belief and love of the Holy Eucharist.

Your deep reverence for the Body and Blood of Christ translates into your deep reverence for the presence of Christ in each patient you serve.

Your reverence for the Eucharist also translates into your deep reverence for the sanctity of every human life.

Our shared belief in the objective truth of the sanctity of human life is the freedom that propels such heroism and courage among so many, in a special way you our nurses, in these challenging times.

This past March 25th, we celebrated the 25th Anniversary of St. John Paul II's encyclical *The Gospel of Human Life* (*Evangelium Vitae*).

His words at the beginning of the encyclical are so poignant 25 years later as we experience the tragedies and traumas of the COVID-19 crisis.

He writes: “The Church knows that this *Gospel of life*, which she has received from her Lord, has a profound and persuasive echo in the heart of every person – believer and non-believer alike – because it marvelously fulfills all the heart's expectations while infinitely surpassing them. Even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart (cf. Romans 2:14-15) the sacred value of human life from its beginning until its end, and can affirm the right of every human being to have this primary good respected to the highest degree. Upon the recognition of this right, every human community and the political community itself are founded.”

Our prayers are with you and every nurse in every hospital and nursing home on Long Island at every moment in these challenging times. God bless you all!