

White Mass
6th Sunday of Easter
Bishop John Barres
Diocese of Rockville Centre
St. Agnes Cathedral
May 17, 2020

Today on this 6th Sunday of Easter, we celebrate our “White Mass”, a Mass traditionally focused on giving God thanks and praying for all our doctors, nurses and medical personnel throughout Long Island and around the world.

Named for the white coats and uniforms worn by many health care professionals, White Masses are special opportunities to ask God’s blessings for all those serving in the health care field and to offer prayers for the safety and well-being of all health care workers and the people they serve.

This White Mass, of course, has a special context this year. All Long Island health care workers join in solidarity with health care workers in the State of New York, the entire country and the entire world to pray for our united efforts to defeat the COVID-19 Pandemic.

In a special way, we give thanks for our six Catholic Health Services hospitals and three nursing homes on Long Island – St. Joseph Hospital, St. Francis Hospital, St. Charles Hospital, St. Catherine of Siena Medical Center, Mercy Medical Center, Good Samaritan Hospital Medical Center, and Good Samaritan Nursing Home, Our Lady of Consolation Nursing and Rehabilitative Care Center, and Saint Catherine of Siena Nursing and Rehabilitation Care Center, and every dimension of their inspirational service on Long Island. We also recognize our many Catholic Charities health care related professionals who serve their clients and residents so faithfully.

In these COVID-19 times, you are an eloquent expression of the Mission of Mercy of the Catholic Church and our belief in the sanctity of human life from conception until natural death.

We pay special tribute today to the prophetic religious communities of women who pioneered and laid the foundation of Catholic healthcare on Long Island.

Catholic Health Services is represented today by Dr. Alan Guerri, President and CEO, Dr. Patrick O'Shaughnessy, Executive Vice President and Chief Clinical Officer and Peggy Reddan, Director of Nursing, Mercy Medical Center.

They have spent the last several months managing the effects of the pandemic in our facilities and in ensuring the right people and the right equipment were available at all times and we are collectively in their debt for the outstanding job they and their teams have done.

We also have present today, Dr. Jeanine Morelli, a family practice specialist and faculty member at the Stony Brook University School of Medicine.

Recently, with the assistance of other Catholic colleagues in healthcare throughout Long Island, Dr. Morelli helped establish a Long Island chapter of the Catholic Medical Association, a national organization dedicated to upholding the principles and moral truths of our Catholic Faith in the science and practice of medicine. I am grateful to Dr. Morelli and Fr. Lachlan Cameron, STL, the Chaplain.

Its members desire to grow in faith, maintain Catholic ethical integrity, and provide excellent healthcare that is faithful to the Splendor of Truth of Catholic moral teaching.

I encourage and urge all Catholic physicians, nurses and medical personnel on Long Island to become active members of the Long Island Chapter of the Catholic Medical Association.

We also have present today two priest chaplains: Fr. Norbert D'Souza, OFM Cap, who serves Mercy Medical Center and Fr. Patrick Onuegbu who serves St. Joseph's Hospital.

We are grateful for the courageous front-line sacramental and pastoral presence of all our priest chaplains and all involved in pastoral care.

In the first Letter of St. Peter, we hear: “Beloved: Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear...”

Catholic doctors, nurses and health care workers: your heroic and courageous witness on the front-lines of the COVID-19 crisis is an eloquent expression, “an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.”

Your deep love and complete dedication of your entire life to Jesus Christ and the mission of Mercy of the Church he founded moves and inspires all of us.

Reflect on how the Holy Spirit guided you into healthcare – the key moments that gave you the conviction that this was the right path, the key moments of your training and education, the development of your own particular expertise and Holy Spirit driven gifts.

You did not foresee a COVID-19 pandemic and yet here you are carrying the Cross valiantly, sacrificially, on the front lines. As 21st century Simon of Cyrenes, you help to carry the Crosses of so many.

Pope Francis once spoke of the Catholic Church as a combat field hospital and he said he preferred “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the street(s)” (EG 49) of the world.

What a perfect image for the way that Catholic Health Services serves all of Long Island and its dedication to the common good.

The glorified wounds of the Risen Christ have touched your wounds and in turn have helped you to touch the physical, spiritual and emotional wounds of the wide variety of patients and families you have served and will continue to serve.

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

Your deep reverence for the Catholic Mass and the Body and Blood of Christ deepens and fine tunes your deep reverence for the presence of Jesus Christ in each patient you serve.

Your reverence for the Eucharist stokes and deepens your deep reverence for the sanctity of every human life.

In John 14, we hear: “Jesus said to his disciples: ‘If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth...”

Your practice of medicine is grounded in the objective truth of the Ten Commandments and the Moral Teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Holy Spirit guides you into truth and keeps you faithful and courageous in living the truth in 21st Century healthcare. You stand strong in your religious liberty and conscience rights as Americans concerned for the common good.

Tomorrow, we will celebrate the Centenary of the birth of St. John Paul II and so we leave you with his words in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae/The Gospel of Human Life* (1995) which address so powerfully our experience of the tragedies and traumas of the COVID-19 crisis.

St. John Paul II 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.*” (2)

Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us!

St. John Paul II, pray for us!

All Saints dedicated to the practice of Medicine and Healthcare, pray for us!

Finally, to everyone joining us today, allow me to thank you for your continued support of our Church in these times. Whether you are supporting your parish, our Catholic Ministries Appeal, our Catholic schools or one of the institutions that are part of Catholic Health Services, you are helping the Church to continue the good and holy work of helping the poor, caring for the sick, educating the young, and preaching God's Word through pastoral outreach. To find out more about the good works of the Catholic Church and how you can help, visit our website, DRVC.org.