

February 8, 2015 The One and Only Physician Homily

My dear parishioners, one of the most remarkable figures of the last century was Dr. Alex Carrel, a renowned physician and brilliant scientist. Early in the twentieth century, Dr. Carrel was awarded the Noble Prize for Medicine. Although baptized in the Catholic faith, he experienced a loss of faith early in his adult life, and rejected religion altogether.

A major turning point in his life occurred when he visited Lourdes, the famous Marian shrine and the site of many miraculous cures. Once he boarded a so-called "white train" that carried many sick people from the French city of Lyons to the village of Lourdes. On the train, he encountered a gravely ill woman, Marie Bailly, a victim of Tubercular Peritonitis. Clearly, the woman was dying and Carrel convinced himself and others that she would not arrive alive at the famous shrine. He told a fellow physician that if Ms. Bailly regained her health, he would become a monk!

Marie regained her health. Sometime later, Dr. Carrel spoke with her. "Marie, what will you do in life now that you have recovered your health", he asked. Without skipping a beat, she replied, "I shall join the religious sisters of St. Vincent De Paul and care for the sick for the rest of my life". Dr. Carrel was left speechless.

The early Christians called Jesus "the one and only Physician". They believed that He alone could heal all our ills. In Mark's gospel, we learn that healing is an important part of Our Lord's ministry. In healing the sick, the presence of God's kingdom is made real. In today's reading (Mk 1:29-39) Jesus works a miracle. He offers an ill woman his hand and makes contact with her. He touches another person. The one healed, Peter's mother-in-law, responds to it in a way which would have pleased Marie Bailly. She puts herself at the service of Jesus and his followers. "Then the fever left her and she began to wait on them"(Mk. 1:31). The Greek word used here, *Diaconea*, is the very word Jesus would use to tell his disciples that he has come not to be served but to serve and to give his life for others.

What lessons can we derive from today's gospel? First, the evangelist, Mark, seems less interested in the miracle than in the manner in which Christ dealt with sick people. If I were to use a common expression, it is that Jesus had good bedside manners. He was compassionate. He treated her as a person, and not as an object. Do we appreciate the work of our caregivers?

Second, we are reminded of one of the Corporal Works of Mercy. Jesus said "I was sick and you visited me (Mt.25:36). Jesus put into practice one of his own teachings! He responded to a sick woman in need. Let us ask ourselves if we consciously and deliberately avoid contact with sick people, even members of our own family? Are we afraid of the gravely ill person?

Third, do we take our own health for granted? In reply to a question I often posed to one of my former parishioners, a ninety seven year old man, "How are you today, Tony? I would invariably get the same answer: "I consider it a blessing each day I awake in the

morning .The Lord has blest me with another day". As someone who has known first hand the trials and tribulations of illness, I can certainly identify with my old friend! In conclusion, let me quote the words of the former Pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI. In his reflection on the gospel reading the pope writes, "The Lord comes to meet us, He takes us by the hand, raises us anew with the gift of his word, the gift of Himself!"

Coincidentally Dr. Carrel was reconciled with the church when he called a Trappist Monk, by the name of Fr. Alexis Presse, to his residence in Paris to administer the Last Rites shortly before his death in November of 1944. May Dr. Carrel's soul rest in peace! Amen.