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September 24, 2019

To All Priests, Deacons and Parish Secretaries
of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux

Re: White Mass

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Each year our parishes are requested to celebrate a “White Mass” for medical and mental health professionals on the weekend either preceding the feast of St. Luke (October 18th) or following it. This year the dates of those weekends are October 12-13 and October 19-20. You may celebrate the Mass at one Mass during one of the weekends just mentioned or at all Masses, whichever works better for your parish. The prayers and readings of the Ordinary Time Sunday are to be used. Below, however, are some liturgical resources to aid your preparation. Included are sample bulletin/pulpit announcements, a homiletic commentary on the readings for both weekends, a model for the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful), some suggestions for liturgical environment and some suggestions for liturgical music.

If I can be of any further assistance to you in this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Glenn D. LeCompte".

Rev. Glenn D. LeCompte
Director, Office of Worship
Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux

WHITE MASS
OCTOBER 12-13 or 19-20, 2019

Sample Bulletin Announcements

If the White Mass is celebrated at all masses during the weekend:

The annual White Mass, for medical and mental health professionals, is being celebrated on (October 12-13, 2019 or October 19-20, 2019) at all Masses in our parish. All parishes in our diocese are celebrating this Mass either on the weekend of October 12-13 or October 19-20 this year. The Mass will include a prayerful recognition of those in the medical and mental health professions as well as a blessing over them. We ask that especially medical professionals wear a distinctive uniform to Mass, and if mental health professionals have something distinctive to wear that represents their profession that they do so as well.

If the White Mass is celebrated at one particular Mass during the weekend:

The annual White Mass, for medical and mental health professionals, is being celebrated on (October 12-13, 2019 or October 19-20, 2019) at the _____ Mass in our parish. All parishes in our diocese are celebrating this Mass either on the weekend of October 12-13 or October 19-20 this year. The Mass will include a prayerful recognition of those in the medical and mental health professions as well as a blessing over them. We ask that especially medical professionals wear a distinctive uniform to Mass, and if mental health professionals have something distinctive to wear that represents their profession that they do so as well.

(Whether or not there is a reception is at the discretion of the parish.)

Liturgical Ministers: If you have people among these professions who have the gift for liturgical ministry, you may want to invite them to perform the liturgical ministries, such as reading or distributing Holy Communion at the designated Mass(es).

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY FOR THE 28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE C

Gospel Reading: Luke 17:11-19

In desperation ten lepers ask that Jesus show them mercy, implying that they want to be healed (17:13). Although he has not yet healed them he tells them to go and show themselves to the priests (17:14). According to Leviticus 13:1-46, the priest is to examine a

leper to declare whether he or she is still infected or has been healed. What is called “leprosy” in the Bible probably refers to a variety of skin diseases, some more and some less severe, which had not yet been categorized as is done in modern medicine. This could include everything from Hansen’s Disease to minor skin irregularities¹. The fact that the “priest” is to examine diseased persons and determine whether they are healed indicates the fact that skin diseases which are not life-threatening or contagious and would heal over time, or perhaps by means of ancient medicines (ointments, etc.), were included in what was perceived to be “leprosy.”

Leprosy here is not only viewed as a physical phenomenon, but as a spiritual one as well. People with possibly contagious skin diseases had to be quarantined in order to prevent them from transmitting the disease. But the same was true of the spiritual deficiency the disease carried. Skin diseases made a person ritually impure. Those whose diseases were at least showing signs of being healed were enjoined to participate in a complex purification ritual and offering of thanks to God, described in Leviticus 14:1-32. Not only did such a ritual result in the declaration of the diseased person being “clean,” but it also provided for a reintegration into society and the worship cult. Thus, Jesus tells the ten lepers to follow the usual procedure of being examined by the priests to determine if they are still unclean or may be declared clean and then to engage in the rites of ritual purification.

All are healed on their way to see the priest, however, only one returns to Jesus to express gratitude. The grateful leper's action indicates his belief that God works through Jesus. Both God (17:15) and Jesus (17:16) are objects of his praise. He prostrates before Jesus as an act of homage (17:16). Jesus interprets his actions as gestures of thanksgiving. In the Old Testament, thanks is given to God (Psalm 118). In other words, the thankful leper substitutes acts of gratitude toward Jesus for the purification ritual and sacrifice. The grateful leper experiences a second healing, which is more important than the first. He comes to faith in Jesus, and his faith leads him to salvation. The healed Samaritan leper becomes the unlikely hero of the story, inasmuch as Jews, descendants of the southern kingdom (Judah) despised those of the northern kingdom (Samaria), especially since its fall to the Assyrians in 721 BC. Some people of the deposed northern kingdom accepted Assyrian customs and religion and even intermarried with them. Those who remained faithful to Yahwism disagreed with their brothers and sisters to the south about the locus of divine worship (see John 4:20). At the end

¹Despite the footnote on 2 Kings 5:1 in the NAB which says, “there is no clear evidence of [Hansen’s Disease’s] existence in biblical times, *Wikipedia* states, “Skeletal remains from the second millennium BC, discovered in 2009, represent the oldest documented evidence for leprosy...A proven human case was verified by DNA taken from the shrouded remains of a man discovered in a tomb next to the Old City of Jerusalem dated by radiocarbon methods to 1–50 AD” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leprosy#History>; “DNA of Jesus-Era Shrouded Man in Jerusalem Reveals Earliest Case of Leprosy”. *ScienceDaily*. 2009-12-16. Archived from the original on 2009-12-20. Retrieved 2010-01-31).

of the day, the fact that the Samaritan is made both physically and ritually pure by Jesus and that he is the only one of the ten to return to Jesus with gratitude and acknowledge that God works through him to heal plays into the Lucan theme of universality of salvation. Indeed, Acts 8:4-25 depicts Philip the Deacon engaging in a ministry to the people of Samaria.

As a character in Luke's story, the thankful leper undergoes a change from being one who is ostracized by society to being one who finds salvation--life in God through Christ. The drastic change which the thankful leper experiences has overwhelmingly positive results for him. Like the grateful leper, all who are led to salvation through faith recognize the need to thank God for his presence and action in their lives, a presence and action most clearly manifest in Jesus' ministry.

Old Testament Reading: 2 Kings 5:14-17

It is hard to get the full impact of the story of the healing of Naaman the Syrian military commander when you whittle away most of it. Naaman is revered for his military leadership, yet the Deuteronomistic Historian attributes his military victories to Yahweh. Ironically in a raid on the northern kingdom, Aram has taken some lands and Israelite citizens as slaves. There is a number of ironic contrasts in the story. The first is that despite Naaman's military valor, he is afflicted with leprosy, which in this case is probably some form of skin disease, but not Hansen's Disease. A second ironic contrast is to be found in the fact that when Naaman is seeking a cure a valuable suggestion comes not from the sages of Aram, but from an Israelite slave girl captured in a raid. She suggests Naaman go to "the prophet in Samaria" (Elisha) whom she claims can cure Naaman of leprosy. Even the suggestion that Naaman go to a prophet in Israel, the attacked nation, to be cured is an ironic contrast. Are there none in Aram who can do so? The King of Aram sends a letter to Joram, King of Israel regarding Naaman's situation and apparently requesting what the slave girl suggested, that he see Elisha the prophet to be healed. Joram rends his garments, thinking that the Syrians are putting him in a position where he might be guilty of blasphemy. Elisha, however, persuades the king to let Naaman come to him that he might demonstrate the superiority of the God of Israel.

When Naaman reaches Elisha's house, the prophet does not himself come out, but rather sends a messenger, to assert his superiority over Naaman. If that is not enough, the prophet Naaman believes can heal him prescribes that he wash in the Jordan River and he will be healed. Here is yet another ironic contrast; Naaman must wash in the dirty river of a nation, some of whose land the Syrians have been able to wrest successfully from them. Elisha's prescription is demeaning to Naaman. He expected that the man of God would perform some kind of incantation and wave his hand over the infected area. Again there is irony in the fact that while Naaman in his prideful anger would walk away from Israel still diseased, his slaves encourage him just to go along with what the prophet recommends, even though it seems banal and demeaning. Nevertheless, for a second time Naaman is convinced by an inferior person to seek his healing in the land of Israel and by adhering to Israelite practices. Naaman

plunges in to the Jordan and he is healed, more specifically he is “clean,” a term dealing with ritual purity.

Having been healed Naaman acknowledges the sovereignty of Yahweh and wants to offer Elisha a gift. Elisha refuses to take it, for to do so would suggest that he is the source of Naaman’s healing, when in truth it is Yahweh. Naaman then requests two mule-loads of earth (from Israel) so that he may offer sacrifice on Israelite soil when he does so in the temple of Rimmon in his homeland.

Naaman has come a long way from being an arrogant military superior to being a humbled individual who needed the help of the god of a subdued nation to be healed of his disease.

2 Timothy 2:8-13

This is the author’s final words of encouragement to Timothy to hold fast to the faith which was handed on to him before the former admonishes Timothy to distinguish false from true doctrine and to correct the injection of any teaching inconsistent with the apostolic tradition. The author, writing in Paul’s name, speaks of how Paul suffers for his steadfastness even in the midst of imprisonment for proclaiming Christ’s resurrection and his status as heir to David’s throne. Paul’s suffering for the faith he knows to be true is a witness to others and is meant to encourage them (Timothy included) to be as steadfast in the faith. The author uses a saying (2 Timothy 11b-13) that at once communicates a truth of faith and exhorts his readers to fidelity to the true faith. According to R. A. Wild, S. J., (“The Pastoral Letters,” in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 900) 2 Timothy 2:11b-13 is a “portion of a hymn used in the Pauline Churches.” The phrases of each line are in the form of “if, then” clauses. Fidelity to the Lord will result in something greater for us. And in each case the expression of the “greater” thing is made by use of a compound Greek verb whereby the preposition *syn* is attached to the verb. For example, “we will live with [him]” is a translation of the verb *syzēsomen* (*syn* + *zan* (“to live”) + 1st person plural future indicative active verb ending). Living with the Lord is the result of “dying with” (*synapethanomen*) him. Notice the compound is also used in the protasis of the sentence where the condition is set. Thus, our union with the Lord in death leads to our union with him in his risen life. “To die with” here could refer to baptism, to physical death or both concepts at once.

If we persevere, we will reign (*symbasileusomen*) with the Lord. Perseverance here echoes the author’s earlier admonition to Timothy to “bear your share of hardship for the gospel” (1:8). What is asserted here is almost a reversal of fortunes. The need to persevere is occasioned by the experience of hardship. The bitter experience of hardship is reversed as the faithful believer shares in the Lord’s glorious reign. The use of these compound verbs indicates more than just, for example, having life, but they suggest that we possess the benefit while enjoying a relational intimacy with the Lord.

However, infidelity will result in a negative consequence. The Lord's denial of us is simply the logical consequence of our denial of him. Our infidelity, however, is not paralleled by the Lord for "he cannot deny himself." The author's assertion of God's fidelity echoes Paul's same assertion in 1 Cor 1:9; 10:13. For God to be unfaithful would be to negate his very being.

The Homily

The Gospel and the reading from 2 Kings lend themselves well to a "White Mass" obviously because they have to do with healing. All of Jesus' healings are prophetic signs that the reign of evil is being broken by God. Sickness is at once a physical, psychological and spiritual reality. Those quarantined with skin diseases in ancient times suffered the psychological effect of being banned from contact with society at large. This quarantine could result in alienation, loneliness and isolation. In addition, those with skin diseases were considered ritually impure, which caused them to be isolated from the worship cult. While they could pray in their isolation, they could not participate in liturgy. By healing the lepers Jesus not only alleviates their physical discomfort, but also addresses their psychological and spiritual malaise. Those who facilitate the physical healing of the sick do more than address their physical needs. Those in the mental health profession and those who do ministry with the sick help the sick to find healing in heart and spirit as well.

Naaman's physical healing points to a greater healing in his life: he is healed of his pride and arrogance and learns from his experience to put his faith in the God of Israel. The time of illness, especially that which is severe, is a critical time in a person's life, because it often causes them to reflect upon relationship with God and eternal destiny. Those in the medical and mental health professions can help the sick person to be reassured that God has not forgotten them, nor has the community of humankind.

The second reading offers us less for the focus of the White Mass, but we might find something in the hymn at the end of the passage. "If we die with him we will live with him." Death is the ultimate effect of illness, yet for one who is joined to Christ in faith, death does not destroy that union. So that even those who are with Christ in his death can anticipate a share in the life of the risen one. In any event, those who are in an intimate union with Christ through faith will have a firm spiritual foundation to fall back upon during the disturbing, disappointing and even frightening times of illness.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY FOR THE 29TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE C

Gospel: Luke 18:1-8

This is a passage from Luke's unique source and it addresses one of the primary themes of Luke's Gospel, prayer. Just prior to this passage Jesus delivered an unnerving speech about the turmoil which will precede the coming of the Son of Man. Luke places a parable about a

persistent woman seeking justice to give his disciples a way to find hope in view of the turbulent times they will face. In fact, Luke tells us that the reason Jesus speaks this parable at this point is so his disciples will not lose heart (18:1).

A widow, a person who in the first century would often be in a difficult life situation if she were a peasant, appeals to a judge who “neither feared God nor respected any human being.” This detail is meant to depict him as one who refrains from administering impartial justice. This widow means nothing to him, and he anticipates there will be no retribution if he ignores her claim, so he just dismisses her. The widow, however, perhaps in desperation, continues to put her case before the judge and demand that he dispense justice to her. He finally gives her what she wants not because he desires to administer justice, but to get her out of his hair. Jesus ironically uses this shady character to make a point about prayer, our expectations and God’s response. Jesus’ argument is one that is *a minore ad maius*. If even an unjust judge, who does not want to grant the widow’s request will do so because of her persistence, how much more can a disciple anticipate that God, who desires to pour out his blessings upon his beloved, will respond to prayer. The ultimate lesson to the disciples is to be persistent in prayer. But what is it that God will provide through this persistent prayer? He will secure “justice” (*ekdikēsen*) for them. In the midst of confusion and persecution prior to the Son of Man’s advent, persistent prayer is the secure foundation for a disciple, even when it is not apparent whether God is overcoming the forces of evil.

Exodus 17:8-13

Having just been delivered by God from a lack of water on their Exodus journey (Exod 17:1-7), the Israelites face yet another obstacle, a military one posed by the Amalekites. The Israelites have no choice but to engage them in battle to continue on their journey. Moses tells Joshua to choose select troops to engage Amalek in battle. Moses stands atop a hill and lifts the staff he had used in Egypt to turn the rivers into blood and to split the Sea of Reeds. Of course, the acts of deliverance were done by God. Moses’ staff represents Yahweh’s authority and power. Moses’ raising of the staff symbolizes that Yahweh’s power is being invoked to help the Israelites overcome the military obstacle Amalek poses to them.

While divine power is important, there is also a human element necessary for success. Moses cannot fulfill the divinely-appointed human role in Israel’s endeavors alone. Moses’ weakness is depicted by portraying him growing tired and letting his hands drop. Actually, the phrase in Hebrew is “Moses’ hands were growing heavy.” When that happens the Amalekites begin to succeed. Moses needs help from his brother Aaron and Hur, who help to support his arms so that he can hold the staff up and the Israelites will emerge victorious.

The verb “to grow heavy” is used in 18:18, when Moses’ father-in-law admonishes him about trying to adjudicate all the people’s lawsuits. His father-in-law tells him that the task “is too heavy” for him, and then advises him that he needs a system of subordinate judges to

adjudicate less important cases. In essence, his father-in-law tells Moses he should only be the “supreme court.” In both the story about the battle with Amalek and that of appointing minor judges the issue of “heaviness” suggests that Moses cannot fulfill his task alone, but needs the help of others.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:2

If the Exodus reading just discussed depicted a battle front, so does 2 Timothy, but of another kind. As Paul continues his exhortation to Timothy to address errors about the doctrinal faith of the Christian movement, he introduces in this passage a source which can give him an advantage: the Scriptures. Since what we know as a “New Testament” was not yet compiled, the Scriptures must refer to at least some of what we know to be the “Old Testament.” The Jewish Canon was not completely settled at the time of the writing of 2 Timothy. Nevertheless the common breakdown of the Scriptures would be the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, the three major categories of the Jewish Scriptures. In any event, the author’s point is that the Scriptures can serve as a solid source for reproof. However, the author reminds Timothy that the Scriptures point to salvation in Jesus Christ. While the doctrinal divergences are not specifically spelled out, if they involved people who insisted on circumcision and the food laws, especially for Gentiles, then the Scriptures would be a solid source for argument, especially if they anticipate salvation through Christ. This is because the opponents would be familiar with the Scriptures. The author casts Timothy’s responsibility in light of the final judgment. Timothy has an appointed task to which he is expected to be faithful, even when it is inconvenient to do so.

The Homily

If persistence in prayer is important when people face the turbulent times that precede the parousia, the same is true when sickness disrupts people’s lives. A persistent appeal to God in prayer can help a person to cope with his or her illness with a sense that God has not abandoned him or her. While proper medical and psychological knowledge and procedures are important for those in the medical and mental health fields, members of those fields who are Christians will know that prayer is a complement to their knowledge. Through prayer medical professionals invoke God’s help for guidance in their day-to-day work, and especially in times when critical decisions must be made.

The first reading touches on the idea of self-reliance. While it is important to be sure of ourselves and our abilities, our knowledge and skills are supported and strengthened through productive professional consultations. It is important at times to realize that we don’t “know it all” and that we can’t “do it all.”

The second reading reminds us that no matter who we are or what we do, the Scriptures are a source of wisdom for our lives. People have a tendency to compartmentalize

life, especially when it comes to faith—that's for Sunday! Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Scriptures are a guide for us in all that we do. While they may not give a medical professional specific information to address a medical issue, they provide, on the one hand, moral guidance, which is an important consideration in every venture of life. On the other hand, applying a spiritual reflection on the ministry of healing as it is presented in the Scriptures provides a broader perspective on the work that medical professionals do on a daily basis.

Scripture Passage Relating to the Medical Profession

Although the following passage is not the reading for the day, your homily may be helped by an allusion to it:

Sirach 38:1-14

Make friends with the doctor, for he is essential to you;
God has also established him in his profession.

From God the doctor has wisdom,
and from the king he receives sustenance.
Knowledge makes the doctor distinguished,
and gives access to those in authority.

God makes the earth yield healing herbs
which the prudent should not neglect;
Was not the water sweetened by a twig,
so that all might learn his power?

He endows people with knowledge,
to glory in his mighty works,
Through which the doctor eases pain,
and the druggist prepares his medicines.
Thus God's work continues without cease
in its efficacy on the surface of the earth.

My son, when you are ill, do not delay,
but pray to God, for it is he who heals.
See wickedness and purify your hands;
cleanse your heart of every sin.

Offer your sweet-smelling oblation and memorial,
a generous offering according to your means.
Then give the doctor his place lest he leave;
you need him too,
For there are times when recovery is in his hands.
He too prays to God
That his diagnosis may be correct
and his treatment bring about a cure.

The foregoing Scripture reading could be printed on a card and given out to the medical and mental health professionals at the Mass.

Sample Intercessions for the White Mass

If desired the presider may invite medical and mental health professionals to come forward and stand before the sanctuary as the intercessions are offered. The concluding prayer is a prayer of blessing over them.

Presider: Christ the Lord came into the world to heal the sick and comfort the afflicted.
Let us pray to him in humility, saying:

Response: “Lord, hear our prayer,” “Hear us, O Lord,” or other response.

Reader: Lord Jesus, you came to cure the sick and heal the broken hearted; enlighten and sustain those to whom you have given the knowledge of healing, we pray to the Lord. R̄

As you preached the Gospel of the kingdom, you healed every kind of illness; show your compassion and goodness to all, we pray to the Lord. R̄

You touched the sick and they were healed; by the gift of your grace lift up the hearts of the afflicted who seek medical help, we pray to the Lord. R̄

You commanded the apostles to heal the sick; hear the prayers of your Church for the speedy recovery of the sick, we pray to the Lord. R̄

Endow all medical and mental health professionals with the gift of wisdom so that they may execute right judgment in the practice of their professions, we pray to the Lord. R̄

May those who suffer from mental illness find relief from their distress through professionals who care for them, we pray to the Lord. R̄

Lord Jesus, you granted healing calmness to those beset with fear and anxiety; enable mental health professionals to continue your ministry today, we pray to the Lord. R̄

That professional policies governing the practices of medicine and mental health will be tempered by Christian morality, we pray to the Lord. R̄

Presider: Concluding Prayer of Blessing (Presider):

With hands outstretched, the celebrant says the prayer of blessing.

Lord our God,
through the power of the Holy Spirit
your Son healed our infirmities and diseases.
When he sent forth his disciples to preach the Gospel,
he commanded them to visit and heal the sick.

Jesus also ministered to those with maladies of the heart.
He gave words of comfort to the crowds whom he perceived as being like sheep
without a shepherd.
He consoled the widow of Nain and the sisters of Lazarus over the deaths of their loved
ones.

By the grace of your Holy Spirit
sustain physicians, nurses, other medical and mental health professionals in their
practice of the art of healing wisely,
that they may continue to serve those suffering from either physical or emotional
illness with care.

May you, O Lord, work through them to comfort and speed the recovery of their
patients and clients.
Restored to health, may their patients and clients be moved to thank you joyfully for
the favors they have received.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, ✠ and the Holy Spirit,
come upon you and remain with you for ever.

Assembly: Amen.

*If desired, a holy card with an image of St. Luke might be given to the medical professionals and
of St. Dymphna to the mental health professionals.*

Environment and Art

Since the color white is associated with health care professionals, an arrangement of white flowers might grace the altar and ambo. An artistic display could be made with draped white cloths. The caduceus symbol (two snakes intertwined around a pole) is the traditional symbol of the medical profession. Psychological professionals use artistic forms of the Greek letter psi (Ψ), the root letter of the Greek word *psyche*, from which “psychology” is derived. An image or sculpture of one hand placed in another (“helping hands”) could connote the concept of mental health. Also, a clear flask of olive oil might be displayed since it is olive oil that is used for the consecration of Oil of the Sick at the Chrism Mass. Indeed, if the parish has a flask of the actual Oil of the Sick that would be easily seen in a display at your Church, that oil could be put into the environmental display. A painting of Moses holding the seraph serpent would be appropriate, since the story is associated with the Israelites’ healing from the serpent bites in the desert.

Liturgical Music Suggestions: The following songs refer to “healing” in their lyrics.

Glory and Praise, 2nd edn.

Amazing Grace
Lay Your Hands
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say
I Will Choose Christ
Lord, You Give the Great Commission
Peace Is Flowing Like a River
There Is A Balm in Gilead

Gather Comprehensive

He Healed the Darkness of My Mind
Healer of Our Every Ill
Jesus, Heal Us
Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above
Song of the Body of Christ
The King of Glory
There’s A Wideness in God’s Mercy
We Remember
You Are Mine

Spirit and Song

Envía Tu Espíritu
Bread for the World
God’s Eye Is on the Sparrow
Holy Spirit

Spirit and Song (cont.)

I Am the Bread of Life
Jesus Christ, Inner Light
Revive Us, O God
River of Glory
The Lord Is Kind and Merciful
The Summons
There Is a Longing
I Will Choose Christ

Worship III

God Whose Almighty Word
God Whose Giving Knows No Ending
He Healed the Darkness of My Mind
O Christ the Healer
Your Hands, O Lord, in Days of Old
Great God of Mercy (Note: This is a Trinitarian Hymn)
O Son of God in Galilee

Lead Me, Guide Me

There Is a Balm in Gilead
Good News
He Touched Me
Victory in Jesus
I Know the Lord’s Laid His Hands on Me (esp. verse 4)
We’ve Come This Far By Faith
What a Friend We Have in Jesus (esp. verse 3)