

Homily for Nurses' Pinning 2018

May 11, 2018

Lk. 8:43-48

Nurses, I congratulate you, I thank you, and I invite you to see the presence of God in every patient.

Congratulations. Gallup Poll annually ranks two dozen professions. For the last 17 consecutive years, the American public considers nurses by far as the profession that is "most trusted and honest." Congratulations on entering this most esteemed profession.

Thank you. Last summer, the wife of a longtime friend suffered a devastating fall at home. She was mercy-flighted to the trauma unit at ECMC. Doctors diagnosed that there was no hope of recovery. The family needed hope and time to absorb the impact of the fall and its consequences. The nurses gave the family hope by saying, "each physical body is different, ... you never can tell how each body might respond, ...we'll have to wait and see."

After some days, the family agreed to take the woman off the ventilator. The husband has allowed me to share with you an excerpt from his letter written to the trauma unit's doctors and nurses, and copied to the CEO: "I write to express my profound gratitude for the wonderful care my wife received from the doctors and nurses of the Trauma ICU. The care she received was remarkable. Each person performed his or her responsibilities with competence, compassion and sensitivity not only to my wife's needs, but also to her many family members and friends." Nurses, I offer on behalf of countless people a profound "thank you" for the competency and care that all nurses wish to demonstrate.

I invite you ... to see the presence of God in every patient. It seems to me, and I might be wrong, that every profession and academic discipline, when deeply studied and pondered, enables that professional to perceive in that discipline God's creativity, imagination, power and goodness. I suspect that the nursing profession especially provides you the opportunity to perceive God's presence in the universality but uniqueness of every patient, in the complex systems yet integrated operations of people's bodies and spirits. Reality repeatedly occasions me to say, "the more I know, the more I don't know."

Nurses, I suspect that you, too, after years of practicing your profession, will confess, "the more I know, the more I don't know." I invite you to perceive the mystery of God's presence, power, imagination and goodness in each person.

St. Luke's gospel reports today that Jesus miraculously cured a woman, who had long suffered a hemorrhage. This is one of two dozen healing miracles performed by Jesus. Nurses, you and I ordinarily cannot perform miracles. In the course of our lifetimes, however, I suspect that most of us will witness medical recoveries that medical professionals cannot explain. Miracles do happen! When we meet our patients, let's follow the advice of St. Augustine who exhorts us, "work as though everything depends on you, and pray as though everything depends on God."

Nurses, I congratulate you, I thank you, and I invite you to see the presence of God in every patient. May God continue to bless and guide each of you, who are healers of peoples' bodies and spirits.