



Archbishop of Montreal

Pastoral Letter at the occasion of the World day of the Sick

“Body and Soul”

“Take care of him” Pope Francis

February 11, 2023

Jesus, referring to the Law and the Prophets, speaks of the two greatest commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Mt 22:37-39)

Love of our neighbour is the love of the entire person, body and soul, heart and spirit. Taking care of the sick is not only taking care of the sickness, but also caring for the whole person in their intrinsic dignity? How can we cultivate that sense of the value of the whole person, each individual person and each person who is sick?

Jesus himself tells us how, as he identifies with the sick and encourages us to visit them: “I was sick and you visited me” (cf. Mt 25:36). Visiting is about taking the time, the time to encounter the person; the time to leave everything else behind, the time to stop what I am doing, the time to take time.

To visit someone is to be present to that person as they are, in their humanity and their vulnerability, and encountering them with humility, compassion, and loving-kindness.

To visit also implies being receptive to the experience of the sick person, as she talks about her pain and suffering, revealing her dignity that shines through her frailty. To visit is to see instants of surrender and serenity, it’s hearing the beating of the human heart. To visit is to be challenged to face my own mortality.

It is as a fellow human being, body and soul, that I go to visit the sick person, who is body and soul. As a human heart, I go visit the sick person, who is a human heart. When we take the time, then heart encounters heart. As spirit, I go visit the sick person, who is spirit. When we take the time to pray, spirit encounters spirit.

Jesus on the Cross bore all our weaknesses, our sufferings, our sins and our death. Jesus Crucified and Risen is the first to come visit the sick. Take a Crucifix to a sick person and place it where they can see it at all times to bring them the comforting presence of the Lord. When we no longer have the strength to pray, looking at the Crucifix is prayer.

I give thanks to God for all the kindness within families and for every time members of a family gather around a loved one who is sick. I give thanks to God for all the caregivers and their faithfulness in accompanying their loved ones who are sick. I thank God for all the dedicated volunteers who give of their time so that no one who is sick should be left alone. I give thanks to God for all the health personnel who give of themselves in caring for the sick and for their dignity.

“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” (Mt 25:40)

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