



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
appointed to be read
in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
on 24th February 2019, the Seventh Sunday of the Year.

HEALING

Dear Friends, especially those of you who are unwell,

In the Gospels, Jesus went through towns and villages curing diseases and sickness, teaching in the synagogues and proclaiming the Good News.¹ The miracles Jesus worked revealed Who He was as God the Son, the Messiah, our Saviour, and the salvation He won for us by His Death and Resurrection. The Heart of Jesus abounds in mercy² and the Church today continues His saving work through the sacraments and prayer, through teaching the Truth, and through the pastoral care of the sick and afflicted. With this in mind, I want to discuss healing, and to announce some new Norms on Healing Ministry.

Sickness, suffering and death are consequences of Original Sin,³ which is why those who are unwell turn instinctively to God for healing.⁴ They look to heaven for help and find it in Jesus and His preferential love for the sick.⁵ The Letter of St. James states that if anyone is ill, they should "send for the priests of the Church. Let the priests pray over them, anointing them with oil, and the prayer of faith will save the sick persons and the Lord will raise them up, and if they have committed any sins, their sins will be forgiven them."⁶ In other words, those in need of spiritual, psychological, mental, emotional and physical healing can turn to Jesus. They can do this in Mass and Holy Communion, in the healing sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing, in Adoration and Benediction, in the Rosary, in pilgrimages, devotions and the invocation of the saints, in prayers and blessings. Jesus told His disciples to heal the sick,⁷ which is why care of the sick, and the service of hospitals, hospices and care homes, is central to the ministry of every parish. In return, those unwell, strengthened by uniting their sufferings with the Lord, can

share in His saving work, obtaining many graces and blessings for others.⁸ Thus the work of the Church compliments, sanctifies and enhances the work of doctors, nurses, psychologists and carers.

Let me now differentiate three overlapping ministries of healing. First, there is healing ministry proper, as just described. Secondly, and more rarely, there is deliverance ministry, that is, special prayer to remove obstacles, bondages, memories, entanglements and addictions of a spiritual origin that hold a person back, impair their well-being and prevent their restoration to spiritual and bodily health.⁹ And thirdly, very rarely, exorcism, that is, ritual prayer, performed by a priest-exorcist expressly appointed by the Bishop, to cast out Satan and the powers of darkness, which in some manner have taken possession of a person's soul and faculties.

In recent years, a beautiful development in the life of the Church has been the growth of healing ministry in its many forms, such as prayer-groups that pray for healing or offer the laying on of hands.¹⁰ Some parishes organise healing Masses and special liturgies, with confessions, the Sacrament of the Sick and Benediction. Again, days of renewal with healing and deliverance ministry are scheduled here and there. In a parish, the chief responsibility for pastoral care lies with the parish priest. But the Holy Spirit also bestows charismatic gifts of healing, deliverance and discernment of spirits upon individual members of the Church to prosper its life and mission.¹¹ The Church takes care to discern these charisms, to order their use and to form those called and gifted to use them with prudence and circumspection.¹² No one may practice a ministry of healing, even less the ministry of deliverance, without appropriate permission and without appropriate formation. Such ministries, caring for the vulnerable, are to be exercised in accordance with the Church's teaching and discipline.

To explain this in greater detail, I have issued for the Diocese some Norms on Healing Ministry and established a Healing Advisory Group as a point of reference. You can read more about this in Enews and on our diocesan website. The Norms are practical; for example, they remind us that in individual prayer for healing, national safeguarding policy requires that, in addition to the minister and the individual, at least one other person should be present. Sometimes the need for healing, say, the healing of memories, becomes evident in those seeking to join the Church or again, in those growing in faith through spiritual direction. This places a unique responsibility on ministers of welcome, on catechists in the RCIA process and on spiritual directors.

One of the best-loved sayings of the Lord is: "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you."¹³ God wants to give in abundance the gift of His healing love and so we rightly turn to Him in our need.¹⁴ The Anointing of the Sick is a powerful sacrament and in my own ministry I have often witnessed its miraculous help. If you or a loved one is frail, seriously ill or due to go into hospital, make sure you let the priest know, so that he can minister this sacrament to them. Pray constantly for the sick and also for the generous medical staff, relatives and friends who care for them, confident that, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, there are some things God will give us only if we ask Him for them.¹⁵ Why not join us for the diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes this summer? Make sure you have a

Communion set in your home with cloth, crucifix and candles. And try to keep Sunday special as a day of humble service of the sick, the infirm and the elderly.¹⁶ Indeed, turn often to Mary Immaculate, Health of the Sick, to our Patron St. Edmund, and to Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, who spent many evenings and weekends visiting the sick,¹⁷ that they may inspire us. May they help us in joy to share our Christian faith with everyone around especially the neediest, *Bringing People Closer to Jesus Christ through His Church*.

In Corde Iesu
+ Philip
Bishop of Portsmouth

¹ Cf. Mt 9: 35. Eucharistic Prayer IV puts it well: “Made incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, he shared our human nature in all things but sin. To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation, to prisoners, freedom, and to the sorrowful of heart, joy. To accomplish your plan, he gave himself up to death, and, rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life.”

² “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. The Father, ‘rich in mercy’ (*Eph 2:4*), after having revealed his name to Moses as ‘a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ (*Ex 34: 6*), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature. In the ‘fullness of time’ (*Gal 4: 4*), when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, he sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. *Jn 14:9*). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God” Pope Francis *Misericordiae Vultus. Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy 11th April 2015* – online at www.vatican.va (February 2019)

³ For the Church’s teaching on Original Sin, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [henceforth CCC] 385-421.

⁴ “Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death. Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him” CCC 1500-1501

⁵ “Christ’s compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that ‘God has visited his people’ and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of. His compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: ‘I was sick and you visited me.’ His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them.” CCC 1503. Cf. Psalm 122.

⁶ The Roman Ritual *Pastoral Care of the Sick. Rites of Anointing and Viaticum. English Translation approved for use in the dioceses of Ireland, England and Wales, Scotland* (London, Geoffrey Chapman: 1983) Instruction p. 84. Cf. James 5: 14-15. The Council of Florence recognised the rite referred to here as one of the seven sacraments: see DS 1324-1325. Jesus’s preferential love for the sick is again shewn by the fact that of the seven sacraments He instituted, one is expressly intended to strengthen those tried by illness.

⁷ Mt 10: 8. “The Church has received this charge from the Lord and strives to carry it out by taking care of the sick as well as by accompanying them with her prayer of intercession. She believes in the life-giving presence of Christ, the physician of souls and bodies” CCC 1509

⁸ CCC 1505

⁹ For more on this, see N. Broadbridge *Our God Heals* (Luton, New Life: 2016), especially p. 129f.

¹⁰ “These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name .. they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover” Mk 16: 17-18

¹¹ 1 Cor 12: 4-11, especially v. 9. Cf. CCC 1508. For a theological and practical account of gifts and charisms, see S. Weddell *Fruitful Discipleship* (Huntington, OSV: 2017).

¹² See *The Roman Ritual. Exorcisms and Related Supplications, English Translation according to the Typical Edition* (2014) Introduction n. 14

¹³ Mt 7: 7

¹⁴ “I am the Lord your healer” Ex 15: 26

¹⁵ Cited by St. Alphonsus Liguori in his treatise *On Prayer* in ed. B. Ulanov *The Way of St. Alphonsus Liguori. The Basic Writings* (Wheathampstead, Anthony Clarke: 1961): “That prayer is the only ordinary means of receiving the divine gifts is .. distinctly proved by Saint Thomas in another place where he says

that whatever graces God has from all eternity determined to give us, he will only give them if we pray for them” (p. 253)

¹⁶ CCC 2186

¹⁷ Teresa Vigna, a nurse-friend of Pier Giorgio’s, said: “He often spoke to me of the Kingdom of Heaven. He used to say ‘No human being should never be left abandoned, but the best of all charities is that consecrated to the sick. That is an exceptional work. Few have the courage to face its difficulties and dangers, to take on themselves the sufferings of others, in addition to their own needs and their own preoccupations and cares’”
R. Claude *The Soul of Pier Giorgio Frassati* (Cork, Mercier: 1960) p. 29