

Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
CEO Installation and Commissioning of Presidents
St. Vincent's Healthcare Jacksonville, Fla.
January 26, 2016

I congratulate our servant leaders whom we are soon going to install and commission. I thank God for Mike, Tom, Huson, Kyle, John and Blain. I pray for them and bless them that they may do God's will for God's people in their new positions.

In the first reading we heard the story of Samuel's call. Samuel heard the voice of God calling him and three times went to Eli thinking that it was Eli who was calling him. Eventually Eli realized that the boy was being called by God. Eli helped Samuel discern and respond to the voice of God. Each of you are all being called in the same way – May you learn to discern the voice of God calling you by name, in the midst of all other voices and seek to do his will in your respective positions.

St. Louise de Marillac desired to respond to God's call and to do God's will at any cost. While still just a teenager, she heard a voice calling her to religious life. Unfortunately, she could not join the religious life because she was born out of wedlock. Her uncle arranged for her to marry Antony le Gras. Although it was an arranged marriage, she truly loved Antony. In their twelve years of marriage Louise grew to deeply love her husband and their son Michael, all the while continuing to hear the voice calling her to religious life.

When Antony became gravely ill, Louise faithfully cared for him as though he was Jesus himself. When he was in terrible pain, Louise saw Jesus Christ suffering in the person of her husband. In those moments of deep love, her empathy for Antony and her ability to see Christ in her suffering husband were a preparation for what was to come; that is, the full realization of her calling to be a religious.

Later, while talking to one of her sisters she states:

In the name of God, my dear sister, reflect often that it is not enough to have good intentions, or for our will to be inclined to do good solely for the love of God. Because, when we received the commandment to love God with all our hearts we also received a second commandment which is to love our neighbor.

Louise's desire to fulfill the dual commandment of love for God and neighbor was not without sacrifice. She herself eventually ran out of funds for her charity work and had to make some difficult decisions. Suffering from the helplessness of their material limitations she wrote to St. Vincent as follows:

In the name of God, my Most Reverend Father, consider whether we should persuade these Ladies not to accept new foundlings... We can no longer stifle the pity aroused in us by these poor people who beg us for what we justly owe them ... They are afraid of dying of hunger and are forced to come from quite a

distance, three or four times, without receiving any money ... Please excuse my constant insistence. (Spiritual Writings, "To Monsieur Vincent de Paul," February 1650, 316.)

The Gospel reminds us about the importance of serving the poor and the sick. Our preferential option for the poor is a fundamental Catholic social teaching. It is our calling as Christians; it is what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Christ ministered to those who were poor, fed the hungry and healed the sick which is the mission of St. Vincent's. As the only Catholic health care organization in this diocese I thank and commend you, St. Vincent's, for your dedication to serving the sick and the poor of Northeast Florida and South Georgia for 100 years. I encourage you to be even more creative in remaining faithful to this core value that defines and distinguishes you from other health care providers.

At the installation of your new leaders, I remind you to reflect on your roots and your identity as a ministry of the Catholic Church. I urge you to adhere to the moral teaching of the Church, especially on the dignity of human life, common good, care for the poor, responsible stewardship and rights of conscience. It is the recognition of these teachings, especially human dignity and common good that motivated St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton to found this ministry. As your bishop, I exhort you to remain faithful to these basic principles.

I encourage you at St. Vincent's Healthcare and the entire Ascension Health ministry to continue to protect your Catholic identity and integrity in today's challenging fiscal and moral climate. Commercialization of health care through competition, moral pluralism and relativism are among the major threats of Catholic health care in our times.

One such threat is the tendency to legalize euthanasia in the secular society, which undermines the sacredness of human life. As leaders in Catholic health care you are the frontline protectors of human life. You are the manifestation of the Church in the ministry of health care. Stay strong in your defense of life and resistance of intentional causing of death by action or omission. Intentional destruction of life is an intrinsic evil. Vatican II documents state,

All offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful suicide ... are criminal; they poison civilization (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 31)

As you have done for 100 years, remain good stewards of human life that is placed under your care. The art of medicine should always serve life rather than hurt, avoiding the modern, secular tendency to hasten death of persons who are terminally ill or perceived as a burden on others.

It is our duty to be vigilant in ascertaining and protecting basic care without requiring forms of treatment that would only secure a precarious and burdensome prolongation of

life. Each of you in Catholic health care has sacred duty of preserving the dignity and sacredness of human life from conception to its natural end. As a good steward of human life, help guide the decisions of your patients and families in order to allow them to make their decisions in favor of life.

Like the health care industry, the Church is on a healing mission. When speaking about the mission of the Church at Casa Santa Marta, Pope Francis said that the Church is like a field hospital that cleans and heals wounds.

This is the mission of the Church: the Church heals, it cures. Sometimes, I speak of the Church as if it were a field hospital. It's true: there are many, many wounded! So many people need their wounds healed! This is the mission of the Church: to heal the wounds of the heart, to open doors, to free people, to say that God is good, God forgives all, God is the Father, God is affectionate, God always waits for us. (<http://www.romereports.com/2015/02/05/pope-francis-homily-the-church-should-be-like-a-field-hospital>)

I commend you for your collaboration with the local church in a myriad of ways, always striving to act in communion with the Church. I encourage you to model your personal and organizational ministry after that of the Church.

St Vincent's Healthcare is a healing ministry. Avoid mere curing of diseases; treat persons holistically by providing healing of body, mind and spirit as you are called to do in your mission statement. As an Ascension Health ministry, strive to remain always a ministry of the Church rather than just a successful business. Pope Francis reminds us that a secular organization may "be powerful but not evangelical because it lacks the spirit, that poverty, that power to heal." (<http://www.romereports.com/2015/02/05/pope-francis-homily-the-church-should-be-like-a-field-hospital>)

Finally, follow the footsteps of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Louise de Marillac and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton – your founders. Imitate Christ the ultimate and holistic healer personally and as a ministry. I promise you my prayers, collaboration and support.

God bless you all. God bless the ministry of St. Vincent's Healthcare.