

**Mass Commissioning Tom VanOsdal,
President and CEO of St. Vincent's Health Care
St. Matthew Catholic Church, Jacksonville
February 12, 2018**

Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez

- As shepherd of God's people in this local Church, I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Tom VanOsdal, on your appointment and commissioning as President and Chief Executive Officer for Ascension–St. Vincent's Healthcare in Jacksonville and South East Georgia.
- In Ascension Health's Mission Statement we read: "**We are a ministry of the Church.**" The Church is the mystical body of Christ, and we are all parts of that body.
- Your first Core Value is "**Service to the poor.**" The poor in basic life necessities, the poor of health and the poor in spirit.

In the first reading, we learn just how much Jesus loves each one of us. No one can exhaust the depth of love that Jesus has for each person. St. Paul refers to this love when he tells Romans nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Using scripture, St. Paul identifies the ministry of the Church with that of Christ. He states, "For your sake, we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." In a special way, this ministry of the Church is the ministry of each associate of Ascension St. Vincent's. You are all called to serve persons sent to you by God as Christ served us. He healed our spiritual, physical, emotional and social infirmities. What a privilege and blessing to do the same in his Name!

Healthcare professionals work with God. Never attempt to leave God out of your work or life. You need Him personally and for your ministry. In his confessions, St. Augustine of Hippo, our patron saint, stated: "*You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you.*"

The greatest poverty is the poverty of spirit. We all crave God and union with him. Nothing can replace this essential longing of every human heart. St. Thomas Aquinas stated that the four typical substitutes for God are: wealth, pleasure, power and honor. We sense the void within us, and we attempt to fill it with something much less than God, only to realize that nothing can fill the void. Only God can make us truly happy for we are made in his image and likeness.

We need to keep God in healthcare. Mother Theresa of Calcutta observed that "*the greatest disease in the West is not TB or Leprosy. It is being unwanted, unloved and uncared for... the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love.*" You are called to embrace Christ and his love for the poor and the sick. Spread the odor of Christ to your associates, board members, volunteers and, especially, the sick and the poor. Since you cannot give what you do not have, invite him into your heart first in humble personal prayer.

In the Gospel, we encounter Jesus in his ministry at Jericho. As he was leaving the crowds who were moved by his love followed him. His love was demonstrated in his miraculous healings,

feeding of the hungry and raising of the dead. If you keep faithful to your ministry to the poor and the sick crowds will follow you at St. Vincent's. Minister to them! Attend to their needs with all your ability!

The Gospel underlines the role of faith in our lives. Although he was physically blind, Bar Timeous' spiritual sight was sharp. Somehow, he knew who Jesus was. He knew that Jesus could help him see! He called Jesus son of David, which implies he knew that the Messiah would be from the family of David and that Jesus was the Messiah. He understood Old Testament prophesies. Hence nothing stopped Bar Timeous from getting Jesus' attention. In turn, Jesus stopped and gave Bar Timeous his whole attention because of his faith. Showing how our spiritual and physical natures work together, Jesus states, "Your faith has saved you!" The role of faith in our healthcare ministry cannot be overstated. Both the caregiver and the care recipient need faith. Like Jesus, and with faith in him, you have the rare privilege to stop and give your whole attention to the fellow person who stands in need of your help at St. Vincent's.

Part of Pope Francis' message for the 26th annual World Day of the Sick in 2018, was that "the Church's service to the sick and those who care for them must continue with renewed vigor, in fidelity to the Lord's command ... The Lord's words brilliantly illuminate the mystery of the Cross, which does not represent a hopeless tragedy, but rather the place where Jesus manifests his glory and shows his love to the end. That love, in turn, was to become the basis and rule for the Christian community and the life of each disciple. ... The Church's maternal vocation to the needy and the sick has found concrete expression throughout the two thousand years of her history in an impressive series of initiatives on behalf of the sick. This history of dedication must not be forgotten."

For more than 99 years the Sisters of Charity were instruments of this legacy of loving care of the sick in Jacksonville, how wonderful it is that the lay faithful embrace that legacy with such dedication.

I thank you for coming together as one national health ministry, so that in solidarity you may transform the lives of the people who live on the margins of our society for the better. You are now the largest Catholic healthcare organization in the United States, and I am impressed with your commitment to transform healthcare for the future; your commitment for holistic care – clearly expressed by adding behavioral health, the inclusion of spiritual care and care of the poor programs.

You have improved access to healthcare by building many primary care centers throughout Northeast Florida and Southeast Georgia and also Pensacola. I exhort you to continue offering quality care at the lowest cost as you have always strived to be good stewards of resources. Keep embracing immigrants and the homeless and those with limited resources. In those ways, you have been true to your mission, and I encourage you to keep doing the good that you do in the name of the Lord.

Once again, I would like to remind you about the role of faith in healthcare. It is our faith which helps us relate to the pain and plight of the poor and the sick. It is our faith which helps us see Christ in the neighbor in need. It is our faith which helps us treat them with reverence as God's

children and images. It is our faith that helps us allow God to choose us as vessels of his love to those who need us the most. I pray you may be strong in your faith and that your ministry to the sick and the poor may be fruitful! May you realize that yours is not a mere profession, it is a calling to work for God and with God so that your actions may heal. By yourselves, you can do nothing since healing comes from God – the giver and sustainer of life. May God be with you and bless your national health Ministry!