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THE CATHOLIC PHYSICIANS' GUILD ON THE MARCH

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One of the most intensely interesting parables of the Gospel is that of the talents. As you will recall, there were three servants. The one had received five talents and by industry had earned other five and was praised by the master; so also the servant who received two talents and earned other two was likewise praised. But the last servant who had received only one talent, went and buried it and when the master of the house asked for an accounting this last servant stated: "Master, I know that thou art a stern man; thou reapest where thou hast not sowed and gatherest where thou hast not winnowed; and as I was afraid, I went away and hid my talent in the earth; behold thou hast what is thine." And his master answered and said to him: "Wicked and slothful servant, thou didst know that I reap where I do not sow and gather where I have not winnowed. Thou shouldst therefore have entrusted my money to the bankers and on my return I should have gotten back my loan with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to every one who has shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him who does not have, even that which he seems to have shall be taken away. But as for the unprofitable servant,

cast him forth into the darkness outside, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (*Matt.* 25).

Lest we be like this unprofitable servant and bury the talent which we received in our vocation and training as a Catholic physician, let us give some thought to the tremendous advantages and possibilities for good which we find in our Catholic Physicians' Guild, and after we have thoroughly convinced ourselves, let us go out and sell the Guild idea to others in our profession.

With this in view, I beg leave to present certain experiences and convictions gathered during eight years of my connection with the Guild in our Diocese of Belleville in the hope that one or the other thought may be of some little help to you.

Guilds from their earliest inception in England in the seventh century had for their purpose, in addition to their social and commercial objectives, a well-defined *religious or spiritual program*. When Leo XIII encouraged Christian workmen to form guilds, or unions, after the manner of the historic guilds of workmen, he directed that these unions or guilds were also to help each member better his condition to the utmost in body, *soul* and property. Encyclical: "It is clear

that they (these unions or guilds) must pay *special attention to the duties of religion and morality.*"

The importance of the spiritual side of the Catholic Physicians' Guild becomes all the more evident when we consider further the purpose of the Guilds and the reason for their existence. The Guild is not just another medical society. You already have a sufficient number of medical societies, and good medical societies. But the Physicians' Guild is a Catholic Action society. The word *Action* would already tell a large part of the story. Your meetings are not to be gatherings characterized by high-sounding eloquence, which quickly effervesces and produces no action and no lasting results. But you must have a *definite, carefully planned program* and each meeting must see you working to improve and expand that program, to carry it out more effectively.

It is therefore important that you take care, first of all, of your own spiritual interests. According to the letter of Pope Pius XI to Cardinal Bertram, dated Nov. 13, 1938, the object of Catholic Action is the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy. *Its essence consists in the pursuit of one's own perfection*, plus an apostolate which is common to Catholics of every rank. Its end is to advance the kingdom of God.

His Excellency, the Most Rev. Apostolic Delegate to the United States, Archbishop Cicognani, ex-

plains this matter further: "Catholic Action is based upon, and presupposes the fidelity of the Catholic to those means of personal sanctification and those evidences of public worship without which there can be no Christian life at all. First of all the Catholic will not only be faithful to, but he will diligently cultivate the spirit and the practice of prayer; attendance at Holy Mass; the frequent reception of the Sacraments, particularly the life-giving Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. . . ."

The Belleville Catholic Physicians' and Dentists' Guild has therefore revised its constitution to read as follows: "The purpose of this Guild shall be: (a) To constitute a brotherhood of physicians and dentists who will teach and practice the ideals of the Catholic religion by diligently cultivating the spirit and practice of prayer, by attendance at Holy Mass even on weekdays if possible, by the frequent reception of the Sacraments, particularly the life-giving Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, and by annual attendance at a retreat for laymen."

We are well aware of the fact that doctors are busy men. They are not masters of their own time, but they must assiduously guard against becoming too busy to look after the supreme interest of our lives, becoming like the busy Martha, "careful and troubled about many things," but neglecting "the one thing necessary." These professional men will become so immersed in their business

of making money that they will find time for only the shortest possible Mass on Sunday morning. They seldom go to Holy Communion; they never make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, never attend a devotion, all for the reason that they have no time. Their Guild calls upon them for meetings, but they have other appointments in their office or with patients.

There are certain points in connection with the life-giving Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist which we should like to emphasize in regard to Catholic physicians. We appeal to you to make a visit a day to the Blessed Sacrament. Most of you have access to some Catholic institution where there is a chapel and where you can go day by day to talk over your difficulties and your cases with our Lord, Who invites you so tenderly when He says: "Come to me all you that labor and are heavily burdened and I will refresh you."

Monsignor Sheen advocates a daily holy hour on the part of Catholic and non-Catholic alike during these distressful times. It would be a splendid thing if our Catholic physicians would set aside the required time for one Holy Hour a week in their program.

But it is especially in Holy Communion that we receive the source of our strength and our help in fulfilling the primary purpose of our sojourn here on earth. You are familiar with serums and antitoxins. Holy Communion

is the most powerful antidote against sin. It restrains and neutralizes our evil inclinations, it allays our concupiscences and the irascible part of our nature. St. Ignatius, Martyr, calls Holy Communion a "pharmacum immortalitatis" and he bases his statement on the words of our Lord: "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath everlasting life and I will raise him up on the last day." Moreover, Holy Communion is a most wonderful tonic, not only to build us up spiritually, because Holy Communion is truly the bread of the strong, but to make of us other Christs, according to St. Paul's statement: "Christ lives in me and I live in Christ."

What different Catholics our doctors would be if they would avail themselves of the privileges which they have in Holy Communion, getting back to the early Christian practices of receiving whenever they attend Mass. And is not this what we pray for when we petition God in the Our Father to "give us this day our daily bread"? Theology teaches that those who during life were devoted to the reception of the Holy Eucharist will after death have a splendor all their own. They will have the so-called "aureola Eucharistica."

But the Guild calls for action, not only in your own lives but also in the lives of others. Your first duty is to the members of your own profession. What about the Catholic physicians in the outly-

ing districts of our large cities? Is there any effort being made to reach them? Are they allowed to suffer from want of moral support, perhaps in danger of shipwreck to their faith, perhaps seriously tempted to compromise the teachings of their Catholic faith in the practice of medicine? I am glad to know that the Detroit Guild has adopted the bulletin idea. This will serve the Guild as a means of reaching these scattered members, of bringing them into the organization. Your duty is not fully done to the members of your own profession until every last Catholic physician who is eligible has been given an opportunity to join the Catholic Physicians' Guild of your Archdiocese.

The members of the Belleville Guild, desirous of providing themselves with the best of spiritual reading, have voted to have the Guild buy a large quantity of Father Stedman's *Daily Readings from the New Testament* and a copy of these readings was sent out to every member of the Guild.

You also have a highly specialized apostolate in the lives of others on account of your profession. One of the Guild's primary purposes is to uphold Catholic teaching. I am happy to know that members of the Detroit Guild were successful in having a paper on birth control taken off the program of a recent medical meeting.

It has been interesting to observe the progress of the Belleville Guild's work in East St. Louis especially against indecent litera-

ture on the newsstands and on the magazine racks of the drug stores. The physician is in a particularly advantageous position with regard to these druggists who are dependent upon the physician for his prescriptions.

Since the dentists of Illinois have no Catholic society for their own profession which is functioning locally, and since it was from the very beginning the wish of our Bishop that the Catholic dentists also be given membership in the Guild, we have followed the lead of the Archdiocese of Newark in this matter and have invited and accepted the dentists for members in our Belleville Guild.

Another purpose of our Guild is to aid the mission work of the Church and this has been done by the gathering of several large shipments of sample medicines and of even cash donations to mission work.

The Guild retreat cannot be too highly recommended. I hope that all Guild members will find it possible to gather annually for a closed retreat at some institution so as to give the members a chance in the quiet seclusion of a retreat to check up on themselves and ascertain whether they are fulfilling the first and most necessary part of Catholic Action; also whether they have not possibly been the unprofitable servants who have literally taken the master's talent and buried it and have not produced any fruits, either in their own lives or in the lives of others.