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A Doctor's Prayer

Wilfred Snodgrass

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A Doctor’s Prayer

The author of this poem was a past president of the California Academy of Family Physicians; the poem appeared in the January/February, 1982 issue of that group’s publication, California Physician. Doctor Snodgrass died of a cerebral hemorrhage in November, 1982.

Teach me, dear Lord, that the hypertrophy of the head is more deadly than the hypertrophy of the heart, that the hyper-acidity of unforgiveness is more distressing than the “heart burn” of an ulcer.

Help me to live so that I can lie down and sleep each night, with a clear conscience, without a bromide or barbiturate, and unhaunted by the faces of those I have charged fees.

Grant, I beseech Thee, the power to focus my eyes on the distant goal of Heaven; eyes undimmed by the blurring myopia of fame or fortune. Keep my ears alert to the call of duty, undeafened by the clinking of polluted dollars.

Guide my mind and hand as I administer healing potions to suffering patients; help me to remember that the hypodermic needles should be tempered with the therapy of sympathy; the tonics enhanced by the stimulant of kindness; the transfusions aided by the nourishment of tenderness.

And then, when the last patient has been comforted, when the stethoscope, journals, and books have been laid aside, may my last call be Thy call, as I rest in the peace which Thou only can send. Amen.

Wilfred Snodgrass, M. D.

Commentary on the Apostolic Exhortation on Human Suffering

Monsignor Lorenzetti, spiritual advisor of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians’ Guilds, gave this address at the group’s annual convention, held in Philadelphia in October, 1984.

Man suffers in ways not always considered by medicine. The suffering is wider and more complex than sickness and, at the same time, is deeply rooted in humanity itself.

While an individual’s pain is contained within himself, suffering, which evokes compassion, has a ripple effect which brings that person to a deeper bond with his neighbor. For example, we can view on television the starvation of children in South America, or witness people who have been bombed in the Middle East and we immediately share in the plight of these victims.

In the Old Testament, suffering and evil are identified with each other. Yet the Christian sees suffering as an experience of evil with a firm basis toward goodness when suffering is united with the passion and death of Christ to bring about salvation.

In the early pages of Scripture, after man had committed sin, the words of the Creator were pronounced: “You are dust and to dust you shall return.” Since that day in history, the mystery of human suffering and death is somehow involved with the consequences of sin.

While man endures suffering, it seems to be particularly essential to his nature that he go beyond himself, to transcend his suffering in following Christ, the Redeemer Who gained salvation for all mankind through His suffering and cross.

Our beloved Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, at St. Peter’s in Rome on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, Feb. 11, 1984, spoke on the Christian meaning of human suffering as a theme for the Holy Year. It therefore seems most fitting that at this national gathering of Catholic physicians we consider a summary and commentary of this apostolic exhortation on human suffering as being of special importance for the guests and participants at this convention.

Msgr. Dino Lorenzetti

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