

Day for Life 2008 —

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit (Psalm 33:19)

Material for Sunday

Some points for an Introduction

- Today our bishops ask us to celebrate a Day for Life. This year we focus on mental ill-health. Mental ill-health can happen to anyone — it is estimated that 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem at some stage in their lives.
- In his recent Encyclical *Spe Salvi* Pope Benedict reminds us that ‘we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering: to avoid as far as possible the suffering of the innocent; to soothe pain; to give assistance in overcoming mental suffering. These are obligations both in justice and in love, and they are included among the fundamental requirements of the Christian life and every truly human life.’ (SS 36)
- The Day for Life is not just a chance to learn about a particular issue but also an opportunity to see what we can do as individuals and as a community to reach out and offer hope to those who in need.
- For those among us who suffer from mental health issues may this be a place of welcome and peace where you can experience God’s love for each one of us. [*This invitation and the general theme may elicit direct approaches from parishioners after Mass — as well as what may be on offer locally the Day for Life prayer card provides a list of websites and other resources.*]
- To help us reflect on these issues further there is a short leaflet which will be given out at the end of Mass. There will also be a collection to support the Day for Life in particular the work of the Linacre Centre for healthcare ethics.

Homily Notes

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A

Reading Zechariah 9:9–10

See now, your king comes humbly to you.

Psalm Ps 144:1–2. 8–11. 13–14 r. v.1

I will bless your name for ever, O God my King.

Reading Romans 8:9. 11–13

If by the Spirit you put an end to the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Gospel Matthew 11:25–30

I am gentle and humble of heart.

The following are some ideas for the homily. In some parishes the homilist may wish to reflect on the readings with those with mental ill-health and/or those who care for them..

- *Come to me, all who are overburdened*— Christ invites all those who are overburdened to find rest in him. People can suffer from many forms of stress in modern life: at work and at home.

- *I will give you rest*— What care can we offer in the parish for those with mental ill-health? What support can we offer those who care for them?
- *The Lord supports all who fall and raises all who are bowed down*— Acceptance and acknowledgement of a situation can be a starting point. Trusting in God and recognising that God will support them through their ill-health are important stages.
- *Revealing them to mere children* — It is the small gestures that can make the difference: the welcome, the hand shake, the accompanying or the small errand.

The Prayer of the Faithful

The general intercessions should follow the form for normal Sunday Mass and include intentions for:

- the needs of the Church;
- public authorities and the world;
- those in need;
- the local community.

Sample Intentions

These intentions are given as examples. It is not intended that a parish should use all these intentions rather that one or two of them might be added to the other intentions a community prays for this Sunday.

We pray for those who suffer from mental ill health;
may they find renewed purpose and meaning in their lives..

We pray for our community;
may we be ready to always reach out to those in need..

Reflection

Great progress has been made in the battle against physical pain; yet the sufferings of the innocent and mental suffering have, if anything, increased in recent decades. Indeed, we must do all we can to overcome suffering, but to banish it from the world altogether is not in our power.

This is simply because we are unable to shake off our finitude and because none of us is capable of eliminating the power of evil, of sin which, as we plainly see, is a constant source of suffering. Only God is able to do this: only a God who personally enters history by making himself man and suffering within history. We know that this God exists, and hence that this power to “take away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29) is present in the world. Through faith in the existence of this power, hope for the world's healing has emerged in history. It is, however, hope—not yet fulfilment; hope that gives us the courage to place ourselves on the side of good even in seemingly hopeless situations, aware that, as far as the external course of history is concerned, the power of sin will continue to be a terrible presence.

Let us return to our topic. We can try to limit suffering, to fight against it, but we cannot eliminate it. It is when we attempt to avoid suffering by withdrawing from anything that might involve hurt, when we try to spare ourselves the effort and pain of pursuing truth, love, and goodness, that we drift into a life of emptiness, in which there may be almost no pain, but the dark sensation of meaninglessness and abandonment is all the greater. It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that

we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love.

Spe Salvi 36–37