

**Lent 4: Saturday**  
**Anointing of the Sick**

Holy Spirit Church

16 April 2018

Dear Father David and dear friends in Christ:

***Introduction***

It is a joy for me to begin my parish visit to the Holy Spirit family by celebrating Holy Mass with you. I am very much looking forward to meeting with you, Father David, and with many of the groups and associations which are anchored in this parish. It will be a time of encouragement and an opportunity for me to learn about how you are living the faith within your community. Perhaps I might even be able to offer some suggestions on how to ensure that your parish remains a vital centre of Catholic worship and sacramental life, and a place which helps each one of you in living your Baptism as a person who bears witness to the Gospel and shares the love and mercy of Jesus Christ with those around you.

***Today's Gospel***

In today's Gospel, John the Evangelist presents a dramatic encounter which shows the frustration of the Jewish authorities when faced with Jesus' popularity. They cannot understand him or what he was about. He has won a following among the crowds. Even the temple police are impressed and express their sentiments: "Never has anyone spoken like this!" (Jn 7:46). And Nicodemus, one of the Pharisees, raises

his voice in Jesus' defence. Realizing that he speaks God's words, some call him a prophet (cf. Jn 7:40). Recognizing him as God's Anointed One, others call him the Messiah (cf. Jn 7:41)

The crowds were attracted to Jesus. Why? Because he preached straight to the heart. He touched peoples' ordinary lives, helping them make sense of their suffering and shame, their fears and their hopes, their desire to do better, even if bogged down. As John says earlier in his Gospel, Jesus knew "what was in man"; that is, he knows the human heart and its yearnings like no other.

The only answer the authorities finally gave to those who were spellbound by Jesus was to make a sarcastic comment about his Galilean origins (cf. Jn 7:52).

Why is there this disagreement about Jesus among the people then – and now?

Lest we become too smug about our ability to "tell the truth about Jesus" because we have the benefit of the Church's understanding, which has developed and grown down through the centuries, we must never presume we have him all figured out. We must never lose our sense of wonder and forgetting that, while on this earth, we shall always see in a glass darkly, as St. Paul observed (cf. 1 Cor 13:12).

The religious leaders of the day had certain expectations about the Messiah. That he didn't fulfill them helped the naysayers to justify their

rejection of him.

Often, we, too, want to fit God into our preconceived ideas. We can forget that there is always much more to learn about the Lord in prayer, and therefore to learn more about ourselves. And remember that a God we could completely understand would be, by that very fact, too small to be the living and true God. We should rejoice that we shall never, not even in heaven, know all there is to know about the Triune God.

### *Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*

We shall now proceed with the Rite of the Anointing of the Sick, that Sacrament by which Jesus himself continues his healing mission in the Church for us, drawing us closer to himself through our pain and suffering. In this Sacrament he strengthens us to play our part with him in his mission of saving the world. The Sacrament comforts us by healing our hearts to accept more joyfully what the Father is asking of us.

The Anointing of the Sick reminds us that, from the moment of our first anointings at Baptism when the Lord claimed us as his own possession, he again assures us of his closeness in our sickness. In the beautiful words of the Holy Father, the greatest comfort that this Sacrament gives “comes from the fact that it is the Lord Jesus himself who makes himself present, . . . who takes us by the hand, who caresses

us as he did with the sick, and who reminds us that we already belong to him and that nothing – not even evil and death – can ever separate us from him.”<sup>1</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Let us pray to Mary, Health of the Sick, who was given to us as our Mother by Jesus as he was dying on the Cross. Let us pray that every person who is sick and suffering might experience, thanks to the compassionate care of those who surround them, the power of God’s love and the comfort of her maternal tenderness.<sup>2</sup> To Mary we turn, confident she will accompany us in our infirmities, our sickness and our suffering, just as she accompanied her Son on the way to Calvary and kept watch at the foot of the Cross.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, General Audience (26 February 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Francis, Angelus (8 February 2015).