

Mass for Lourdes Hospitalité
Immaculate Conception Church, Maryhill
Sunday, 18 September 2011

St Paul addresses a dilemma which all of us at some time must address – particularly the sick.

There comes a time when old age or sickness brings on a weariness which makes us wish it were all over and there are some who would take the matter into their own hands and seek to end their lives and expect others to assist them in doing so.

At the same time we do not want to be parted from family and friends – nor to continue to enjoy as best we can the good things of this life – even though we are promised better things to come in the life hereafter.

And so he has another added reason for wishing “to be gone and be with Christ”. Yet his thought was also that “to stay alive in this body is a more urgent need” and he thought of that need as ours, namely the Church’s.

We may think of the need to relieve others of our care – but we must never think along those lines, since by caring for the sick, others have ample opportunity of exercising that love of neighbour which is the second of all the commandments and mirrors the first – our love with all our hearts and souls and strength for God our Heavenly Father.

Indeed we will be judged by Him whom the Father has appointed as judge – Jesus himself – on the basis of whether we visited Him and cared for Him by visiting and caring for the sick. We must never deprive others of this opportunity.

But still the dilemma remains. Can we face the disabilities of old age and of sickness? Will we have the grace to do so?

St Augustine in his sermon on Shepherds in the Divine Office tells us that as ministers of the Gospel – as shepherds of the sheep – we must provide, as it were, the splint to correct the fractured limb of the injured sheep – and this is what he said:

“Here is a splint to correct the fracture. I mean those consoling words, ‘God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape (from it) that you may be able to endure it’”.

So, as the first reading (from Isaiah) advises: “Seek the Lord while he is still to be found, call on him while he is still near.”

We can think of our disabilities and pains as our purgatory – or of assisting others to make up for their sins.

As Isaiah says: “Turn back to our God who is rich in forgiving – for (our) thoughts are not (his) thoughts (our) ways not (his) ways, it is the Lord who speaks. Yes the heavens are as high above the earth, as my ways are above your ways, my thoughts above your thoughts.”

In our anointing of the sick and our prayer for them we express our faith in the loving mercy of God and in his healing power. That is the sacrament we now administer.