

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: White Mass

*27th Sunday in Ordinary Time*

*White Mass*

*Basilica of the Assumption*

*October 8, 2017*

Ten days from now, the Church will celebrate the Feast of St. Luke – St. Luke the great evangelist and also the patron of physicians – for, as Tradition attests, St. Luke was himself a physician, first of the body and then of the spirit. So, this morning we ask St. Luke to intercede for all medical professionals, those who have joined us this morning at our annual White Mass, and those who serve throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore. May they be guided by the hand of God and sustained by the grace of Christ as they seek to engage in the art of healing body, mind, and spirit.

And all of us should pray for those who serve in the medical professions. We greatly value the service they render to us and to our families in helping us overcome illness and maintain our health. And even those of us who are not in the medical field are aware that these days medicine is an especially demanding calling. It is in fact demanding, not only in the knowledge and skills needed in the rapidly changing fields of medical technology, but also because our country is unsettled and divided over the best way to deliver medical care to the many of our fellow citizens. Add to that the many challenges in the vast field of medical ethics and the challenges medical professionals face when they allow their religious faith to influence their practice. So it is important that these good professional men and women of faith pray with us and equally important that we pray with them and for them, asking the prayerful intercession of St. Luke on their behalf and ours.

It is also important that, in the midst of this Holy Mass, we ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that we may reflect well and wisely on the meaning of today's Scripture readings, for all of us gathered here for Mass and, in particular, for those of you who represent the medical profession.

Of course, on an occasion such as a Mass for medical professionals, it *would* be nice if the Gospel were one of many New Testament passages where Jesus performs a cure or speaks about healing the human spirit... Instead, both the first reading and the Gospel speak about a vineyard which God has planted in the world... So we may be tempted to say that the image is all wrong – for, a vineyard is not a hospital and the vinedresser’s art differs vastly from the medical arts. Yet, we *do* have something to learn from the Lord’s parable about the vineyard, whether we are patients or whether we are medical practitioners. Let’s take a look.

In the reading both from Isaiah and Matthew, God is depicted as the owner and the grower of a vineyard. Both readings make clear that God has planted his vineyard well – he chose a fertile hillside, he spaded it, cleared it of stones, planted the best vines, put a hedge around it for protection, dug a winepress, and built a watchtower. Nothing was lacking that would prevent a wonderful harvest. The vineyard, of course, stands for the People of Israel and, by extension, it also stands for the Church of which you and I, all of us, are members. Just as God bestowed abundant blessings upon the people of Israel, so too he has blessed his Church with every means of holiness, especially the Word of God, the Holy Mass, the Sacraments, and so much more.

And, as today’s Scripture readings tell us, the leaders and indeed all the people are called to work in the vineyard and are expected to bear a good and abundant crop of grapes, which is another way of saying that we are expected to bear an abundant harvest of holiness and virtue. Yet we see that God, who own the vineyard, is disappointed in the harvest. In Isaiah, the vineyard yielded wild grapes, that is, a harvest of iniquity – bloodshed and injustice – just as we saw in the Las Vegas shootings and on the violent streets of Baltimore. In the Gospel, the tenants withheld the owner’s share of the harvest. When the owner sent to them messengers, the tenants mistreated and killed them. And they did the same when the owner sent his own beloved son. Of course, the messengers of which Jesus speaks are the prophets and the Son whom the tenants killed is himself, for Jesus laid down his life to save us.

This Gospel challenges us to examine our consciences about the harvest of *our* vineyard. We are part of the Church and called to labor in this vineyard. Yet, are

we committing the same sins as the wicked tenants in Jesus' parable? Note that in the parable the tenants are not condemned for any lack of skill. It wasn't that they lacked ability to grow good grapes. No, the real problem is that they wanted the vineyard all to themselves. They wanted to remake the vineyard in their own image and likeness and keep for themselves whatever they managed to harvest. How easily we can be like that -how easily we can ignore the saints whom God sends us as messengers... even reaching the point of marginalizing in our daily lives God's own Son, Jesus. How easily we can try to recreate the faith and the Church itself, making it more to our liking by picking and choosing what teachings we will follow, by sticking with the faith only when it meets our emotional needs, or leaving the Church when it challenges us to think and live differently. When we behave in such a way, we are like those tenants in the Gospel reading who forgot who owned the vineyard and withheld from the owner his rightful share of the harvest - in our case, a harvest of holiness and virtue.

But what about those of you in the medical professions? How does this parable of Jesus apply to the challenges that you face every day? For, I would imagine you sometimes think of your hospital or clinic as a sort of vineyard where you tend to your patients with loving care and seek to produce, if I may say so, a harvest of healing and peace. And, as medical science advances, you are able to care for your patients more and more effectively - yet I think you know there are dangers embedded in such progress. For recall that Jesus did not condemn the tenants for their lack of technical skills; for all I know, they were top-of-the-line vinedressers! What Jesus condemns them for is supplanting the role of the owner. They wanted to be the owners, not the lessors, the boss not the laborers. And they wanted to remake the vineyard and reap its rewards not according to God's plans but according to their own - and God's designs give pride of place to the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable, for in serving them we serve God's own Incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

With the march of progress in the medical field, there is always the temptation to forget who is the author and owner of human life. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, who themselves tended to be rebellious lot, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and *that you are not your own*" (1 Cor. 6:19). So even when it comes to our own lives, to our

body, mind, and spirit, we are not the owners but the stewards, not the authors but the reverent discoverers, not the masters but rather the loving and grateful caretakers - and for that reasons, as St. John Paul II taught us, 'ethics must always precede technology.'

Paul in our reading from Philippians shows us the way. Whether we are part of the medical profession or not, we are called to live our lives in such a way that they produce a harvest of truth, honor, justice, purity, beauty, and graciousness - that is to say, the excellence of holiness and virtue (cf. Philippians 4:8-9). When we, as members of the Church do so, then the vineyard of the Lord, the Church, shall unite in bearing witness to that 'peace which is beyond understanding,' for the good of all and for the glory of God.

Through the intercession of St. Luke, may God bless us and keep us always in his love!