

NICHOLAS KING

INTRODUCTION: It gives me great pleasure to introduce our first speaker of the afternoon, Father Nicholas King, a Jesuit, a biblical scholar and translator and based at Oxford University. He has been a long term member of the hospitality here in Lourdes and in fact has travelled with HCPT on occasions in the past. There's a malicious rumour that he actually appeared on the black and white movie that was shown with Michael Strobe's piece at the beginning of the conference. I'm quite sure he was in short pants if he did appear in that.

(LAUGHTER)

INTRODUCTION: So ladies and gentlemen, Father Nicholas King.

(APPLAUSE)

(SPEAKING IN FRENCH)

(LAUGHTER)

And now for the rest of you.

(LAUGHTER)

It's a difficult time of the afternoon this, isn't it? You've just had a very good meal, one or two of you washing it down with generous helpings of the good local red wine. Will you please therefore all snore quietly?

I'm going to give out the title of the talk in section headings and that sort of thing. There'll be 6 sections and a conclusion, so if you hear me in your deep slumber saying, now we turn to section 3, you know you've got another couple of hours to go.

(LAUGHTER)

It's great to be back with HCPT. I haven't actually been on an HCPT pilgrimage since 1965 when most people here weren't born I think and I was in Michael Burn's group. So there we are.

Anyway, the title is Jesus and the Other Abled and the sub title because you've always got to have a sub, you know that, don't you? You must have a sub title. The sub title is, People with Disabilities in the Gospels, how the word of God speaks to us today. So section 1, we're underway and the torpor comes over you, doesn't it? Section 1 is the miracles of Lourdes.

There are miracles in Lourdes and I don't mean those beloved of excitable journalists, the physical healings deemed inexplicable in the present state of medical science, though they undoubtedly happen. I have myself known a couple of people who have been cured here in Lourdes.

What strikes me is the ordinariness of it. How little in some ways those people have been affected by the experience. Some of them indeed have been or have remained unbelievers. No. The miracles that strike me are those more frequent ones that we get here, such as the following from my latest visit just a couple of months ago with our pilgrimage. There was the experience firstly of sitting one afternoon at the back of the Pius 10th Basilica as the blessed sacrament procession was starting. The crowds were immense, this year being the Jubilee Year. I was feeling out of sorts, rather gloomily wondering whether I should have come at all this year and the run up to the processing was irritatingly noisy and disorganised and yet something took place there which touched the whole group. There was a silence and a sense of the entire people of God being at one in the unmistakable presence of the Lord. No doubt there were some whose mind was not on what they were doing, probably there were many who were distracted or plotting how to get out quickly at the end or admiring the girls. But that sense of the body of Christ formed unexpectedly out of many nations was real and tangible. The noise fell away, though it may still have been going on and it was clear that we were all engaged on the same task.

Secondly, there's the Lourdes miracle of the inversion of normal priorities. It sounds a bit complex, doesn't it? What I mean is this. There was a really splendid international Mass on the Sunday that I was there. It was extremely well done but the person who mattered most wasn't the presiding Cardinal from Rome, whatever he may have thought about it, but quite clearly all the way through that service, it was the sick or other abled, those who challenge our absurd social pretensions and whose prominent position here in Lourdes makes obvious sense.

Thirdly, there's the miracle of the youth. The miracle here is that they're not knifing each other, nor overdosing on drugs or alcohol, though I suppose it would be safe to say that they don't exactly take a pledge of temperance here.

(LAUGHTER)

Nor do they, whatever you read in the newspapers, selfishly go about their purposes disregarding the needs of others. Here, the youth pay out quite large sums in order to have the privilege of serving those whom the world disregards. They serve those other abled with a quite challenging generosity and they find that, in doing so, they are learning to make sense of their lives and this is not what you ordinarily read about young people in the newspapers, is it? But those young people issue a ringing and stirring challenge to us who are their elders.

Fourthly, there's the miracle of love. Everywhere you look in Lourdes, there are people reaching out in love to others who they see as less fortunate than themselves and the extraordinary thing is that it works. It makes sense, it fits the deepest yearnings of our humanity and it seems all the time utterly natural. But it also transforms our vision of what life is about. You can think of a thousand examples. I noted one at the beginning of the international mass during that week. It was a mother having a really difficult time with a rather disturbed son, I should guess, in his twenties. He simply sat down on the floor and wouldn't move. You've seen this many times, haven't you? But a woman standing next to her was carrying a stool which she clearly intended to use for herself. Instead, it was quite clear they didn't have a language in common, she offered the stool to the young man, who smiled and the mother smiled and the woman who'd offered the stool also smiled and her

smile was the most radiant of them all. Now, moments like that are frequent in Lourdes, aren't they? And we've all seen them but maybe we just don't notice them sufficiently and take them aboard because they speak to us. They speak to us of the deepest truth of the Kingdom of God, that love, sometimes quite difficult love, is what it's all about.

And that miracle has its opposite. It was an extraordinarily shocking experience to return after two weeks in Lourdes and to run immediately into quite another world. After two weeks, during which the other abled had been instinctively given priority, it was like a cold water shower to return to the loveless world of regulations and risk assessment and health and safety, though we know that health and safety has made its mark here in Lourdes also. But it was a terrible shock to notice the attitudes of the group who were employed at the English airport into which we flew. The people, the other abled people that we brought with us, for them were parcels to be shoved around, not altogether sensitively nor, alas, painlessly. They were not to them, so it seemed from their actions, human beings, those human beings who had commanded instinctive respect for all the preceding days and who'd been loaded so attentively and sensitively and no less expertly here at Lourdes airport. Then a few minutes later, there was a British Frontier official who regulations did not permit to return the hat that a sick person had mislaid, nor would he allow me to cross the border in search of the person and then return. These are tiny examples but they point negatively to something of the reality that is Lourdes and I use the word reality advisedly.

Now, at this stage, you may be asking, if you're still awake, what all this has to do with my topic of Jesus and the other abled. Well, I want to suggest to you that what we receive in Lourdes is a vision of the way the world really is, that it is constituted at its very deepest level by love. So that when we are forgetting ourselves in the way that we find ourselves doing here in Lourdes, we're expressing our real selves and the reality of our world and that other world to which we return after Lourdes, where people don't instinctively reach out in love, is not after all the real world but a dreadful parody. Although I have to admit that those gracious values aren't to be found exclusively in Lourdes, if you saw the recent para Olympic games in Beijing

and the growing acceptance of the other abled that they betoken, you'll know that these values are catching.

And what is this real world? It's the world of which Jesus speaks as the Kingdom of God and then tells you that it's within you or among you. It's not that very different world of selfishness and regulation keeping to which we return after the pilgrimage. Those Lourdes miracles to which I've been referring have the function of all miracles, namely that they point to the reality that God is at work in our lives and those people whom we call other abled, disabled or sick or handicapped, whatever term we use for it, they are important. This is what Jean Vanier was saying this morning, isn't it? They are important in this reality, not because they're particularly virtuous but because of their graciousness in putting up with our inexpert, I have to say, bungling attentions. And also because it is in their weakness that God's power shines out, as indeed it shines out in the weakness of those of us who are called helpers.

Section 2 and you're still there, some of you. Section 2 is called The Experience of Young Helpers in Lourdes. Now, you've just had your lunch, so I must be careful what I say but one thing that happens in Lourdes is the discovery that you can do things that you would previously have thought impossible. You discover that you can cope with clearing up human faeces and urine and vomit and other human detritus, that you do not after all faint at the sight of blood, that you can be near someone's corpse and not quite overthrown by it, that you can deal with people who have what we regard as the most terrible deformities and the reason for that is that somehow here in Lourdes, we learn to treat other human beings precisely as human beings, so that if we get it right, which we don't always, we're not doing it with an air of gracious condescension, so I'm playing Lady Bountiful to you but because this is another human being, not one of the disabled or sick, as we too easily label them. That's true obviously that very often you're performing for them a service that they cannot perform for themselves. Lifting or washing or feeding. But the discovery that you make very early on in Lourdes is that in performing these tasks you gain at least as much as you give and actually much more and what we gain has something to do with that precious reality of our shared humanity.

And that of course is why we speak of people as other abled. It's that the people we meet here in Lourdes are different and have different abilities and we all know the truth of this, they have taught us a great deal about the meaning of being human over our years of service. But we need constantly to be reminded of this because we're all very bad at relating to what is different. I'm English and you're French. I'm black and you're white. Male and female, short and tall, slave and free, Christian and Muslim, all believing and atheist. There's a human tendency ... and John was talking about this, this morning, to put what is different on the margins and so reinforce in us our own sense of complacently inhabiting our comfort zones. And almost without knowing it, our response to the psalm is, we are different therefore I am better than you and when you put it like that, it sounds absurd, doesn't it? But that's the position that we slip into almost without noticing it. And what I'd like to do in the rest of this talk is look at how Jesus deals with what is different or other abled in the gospels and then see what that might mean for us today, especially here in Lourdes and then back home.

So Section 3, are you there? Section 3, Jesus and a Mother in Law. If this weren't a Catholic congregation, I would give you the bible reference. Well, I will because not everyone here is Catholic, so it's Mark 1, 29 to 31. Let me start with the text of this quite extraordinary story. This is how Mark tells it, though Matthew and Luke also have a version of it. "And immediately coming out of the synagogue, they came to the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John and the mother in law of Simon was lying down, burning with fever and immediately they tell him about her. And approaching, he raised her up, taking her by the hand and the fever left her alone and she started to serve them." Now, the first thing to notice is that this takes place on the Sabbath day when no work should be done and so it's only in the next verse when evening has come and the Sabbath is therefore over that they brought to him those who were sick and suffering from demons. But Jesus simply doesn't care about the rules when there's a question of human suffering. It's worth noticing that when the mother in law is described as burning with fever, in a society with no antibiotics, that could mean that she's not far from death. So the suffering is potentially lethal and goes wider than just that one woman.

Now, Sabbath observance is not the only rule that Jesus breaks here. For the mother in law, we'll leave aside the role of the mother in law in English culture ... there may be some mothers in law here, you see ... who act as a kind of joke figure, a symbol for undesirable unpleasantness. Anyway, there she is and notice she will have been lying down in the women's quarters where no male should go. To get the picture, imagine if one day in the next pilgrimage season here in Lourdes, a bronchardio were to be seen stumbling into the women's basselines. That's the kind of response that Jesus would have evoked. Jesus is not one for the rules. And this is something that's evident in the next gesture. He raised her up, taking her by the hand. Now, it's important to get the context right here. The world into which Jesus was born was patrolled by purity regulations. There were strict rules about who could be touched and what to do if you contracted impurity and they excluded you at least for a while from ordinary human interaction. In particular, women and corpses or, as in this case, the nearly dead, were great sources of impurity. And Jesus here shows a sublime neglect of the rules of purity because (a) Simon's mother in law is a woman and therefore in that society potentially impure and therefore not to be touched; and (b) she might be a corpse and therefore doubly impure. And Jesus simply takes her by the hand, just as helpers here in Lourdes often reach out in love. But notice the effect. Two things happen. The first is he raised her up. We hardly notice this word but in fact the verb is one of the two main ways of expressing resurrection in Mark's gospel and resurrection of course is the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God which you and I encounter here in Lourdes. And the second thing that happens is she started to serve them. Now, some feminist scholars get a bit cross about this seeing it ... you know, the men exploiting the women as usual. But actually that's to miss the point because service is a very high value in the gospel of Mark. It's what angels do, it's what the women do. Alas, the men aren't quite up to it. And above all, it's what the Son of Man does. And it's what happens to us here in Lourdes. Our experience here of the Kingdom of God, if we receive it properly, inevitably, inevitably drives us in the direction of service and of course you and I have also been served by our other abled.

Section 4, Jesus and lepers. Here's another story of healing in the gospels and just watch Jesus meeting and welcoming the other abled. As John was saying this morning, to be a leper was to be seriously on the edge of society. And it happened

on the journey to Jerusalem and he was going through the middle of Samaria and Galilee and as he was going into a certain village, 10 male lepers met him. They stood far away and they raised their voices saying, Jesus, master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said, go and show yourselves to the priests and it happened as they went, they were made clean and one of them, seeing that he was healed, returned glorifying God at the top of his voice and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet giving him thanks. Now, this one was a Samaritan and Jesus responded. Weren't 10 made clean? Where are the 9? Were none of them found to return and give glory to God except this foreigner and he said to him, rise up and journey on, your faith has saved you. And this is a good example of how unimportant the miraculous healings are here in Lourdes, or rather how their importance lies in the reality to which they point. The context of the episode is that the journey to Jerusalem which takes up the second half of Luke's gospel has started and Luke makes it kind of the centre of his gospel. You'll have noticed I think that the word journey appeared twice in that passage and it may help you to think of that word instead as pilgrimage and so place it within your own Lourdes experience. And notice how Luke sets the story through the middle of Samaria and Galilee which doesn't make any sense geographically but gives that important sense of being in foreign territory. And this is stressed further by the fact that Jesus is hailed not by one leper at the beginning but by ten of them and they're males, so they might easily be seen as a terrible threat. Leprosy was a frighteningly contagious disease and there were strict rules for keeping those who suffered from it well away from normal civilised society. These people are therefore very much other. So this gang might seem very menacing indeed, but they're not, for they stand at a respectful distance, they call Jesus master and they ask him for mercy. And oddly, Jesus tells them as though they were already cured to go and see the priest rather as here in Lourdes, Bernadette was told by Our Lady to go to the priest and tell them to build a sanctuary. And as they turned to go, they are indeed healed but the story doesn't stop there and here, we may need to reflect on our Lourdes experience. For it's not the getting cured that matters, as I've already said, that's relatively trivial and all those who get cured in Lourdes are going to die sometime of something. What matters is recognising the presence of God at work and the only person who does that is a Samaritan. What's the equivalent of a Samaritan? Well, for each of us, it's anyone who is other. The Lourdes analogy that I find helpful is Les Giron.

gypsy pilgrimage. Now, they've always been in Lourdes over the last 40 years anyway, at the same time as our pilgrimage and they have a beautiful and a devout pilgrimage with lovely music that sends a tingling up your spine. But they also have a reputation for violence, so that cafes are closed and taxi drivers are not available when that pilgrimage is in town. I'm reminded of the old French saying ... (TALKING IN FRENCH) ... this is a very bad dog, when you provoke him, he bites you. So Samaritans or Giton or blacks or Afro Caribbeans with a Scottish accent ...

(LAUGHTER)

... or Yorkshiremen ... are the other but it is a Samaritan who turns back to glorify God. He is other abled and enables us to see the truth about the Kingdom that has broken into the world in Jesus, so that Jesus is able to say of him, your faith has saved you. Notice that that doesn't mean the other 9 lepers are deprived of their healing. It's rather that being saved involves recognising what's happened to us and praising God for it, acknowledging the power of love that is loose in the world and that ... tell me if I'm wrong ... is what happens to us here in Lourdes.

Section 5. This is called Jesus and alienated women 1. That's because the next section is going to be called Jesus and alienated women ... you've guessed it, yes. Right, OK.

(LAUGHTER)

So here's another story where Jesus deals with the marginalised and a great crowd was following him and they were pressing in on him and a woman who'd had a flow of blood for 12 years and had suffered a great deal at the hands of the medical profession ... sorry doctors about that ... and had spent every penny she had without being helped in any way, indeed she'd got very much worse, having heard about Jesus came up in the crowd and touched his clothing from behind for she was saying to herself, "If I can just touch his clothing, I'll be saved." And immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up and she knew in her body that she was healed of her affliction. And immediately Jesus, knowing in himself that power had gone out of him, turned in the crowd and started saying, "Who touched my clothing?" And his

disciples were telling him, "Do you see the crowd pressing in on you? Are you saying, who touched me?" But he kept looking round to see the woman who had done this and the woman in fear and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell before him and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has saved you, go in peace and be clean from your affliction." Now, the crowd in this story may remind you of the crowds that throng round Jesus in the Eucharist here in Lourdes. Sometimes it seems like a rugby scrum, sometimes you think your life's in danger when you're giving out communion in the underground basilica. But the point is that those who are excluded elsewhere feel here in Lourdes that they can come to Jesus and find what they're looking for, even if their situation is irregular in some way. Last evening Bishop Perrier was talking about the prostitutes pilgrimage. A tiny number of women, 50 or so, from Paris but they can come here in Lourdes, he knew about it, no one else knew about it, they were invisible but they were able to come near to Jesus in the crowd. Very beautiful story about what Lourdes is really for.

Typically, Mark has wrapped another story around this one. That's the story of the synagogue official whose daughter, notice another alienated woman, was dying. But you're going to have to read that story for yourself tonight because Mark wants us to hold both stories together and understand them together but I haven't got time to read it with you now. For the moment, just watch Jesus, how he's dealing with this other abled person. Notice the nature of her affliction, a flow of presumably menstrual blood for 12 years which meant that no one could touch her without also contracting her ritual impurity. We can only dimly imagine what that meant for her. She couldn't be touched by her family, by her husband, by her children because they would then contract her impurity and she certainly shouldn't be out in a crowd like this because anyone who touched her would get it. So she's alienated from family, from friends, from the entire human race and presumably even from God himself and she is many of the people that you and I have been privileged to serve here in Lourdes. And now she does a terrible thing, she deliberately touches Jesus in the crowd and from behind, so that he can't know who's done it and this means that Jesus has now contracted her ritual impurity but he doesn't know it. But Mark ... Mark wants us to be on her side. He allows us to eavesdrop on her thoughts. We hear her say, "If I can just touch his clothing, I'll be saved." And as we listen, we're

actually egging her on to break the rules in this way and so we rejoiced when she was cured. Notice she knew that she would be saved but at this stage she's only cured, which is different. So she's cured of her affliction and the word that Mark uses for affliction is a word that means whip or scourge, showing that he understands how awful it was. But alas, she hasn't got away with it and Jesus feels something. Now, he doesn't feel, oh Lord, I've caught impurity but he feels power has gone out of him and the disciples, who could be us, they who lack his ready sensitivity to the other abled, jeer at the absurdity of his idea that he might be able to find out who touched him in a crowd like this, like the crowds that surround Jesus here in Lourdes at the international mass in the blessed sacrament procession. But Jesus keeps looking and Mark makes it clear that he knows it's a woman who's done this and so in fear and trembling, she owns up and we wait anxiously to see what's going to happen. And it's beautiful, as beautiful as those unexpected encounters that you and I have often had here in Lourdes, thanks to those other abled whom we serve because instead of Jesus saying, as we're half expecting to, "You stupid woman, now look what you've done, you've given me impurity", instead of that he calls her by the beautiful title of daughter. In other words, she's now become one of the family of the God whom Jesus addressed as Father, precisely as in Lourdes this extraordinary mix of peoples with their diverse abilities and gifts are formed by the action of God's Kingdom into a family. You've often seen that, haven't you? And then Jesus continues, as he did previously to that foreign leper, "Your faith has saved you" and that, remember, is what she'd been looking for and she wasn't given that by the mere fact of being healed.

So what is this faith that has saved her? It's the recognition that all of us, all of us who are other abled, need to come to eventually that in Jesus, all our sickness and all our awfulness and all our unsaviness that Jean Vanier was talking about this morning, can find their healing transformation was the word he used, wasn't it, so that we are restored into the God likeness in which we were created. And that's the beauty that keeps arresting us here in Lourdes and it is the other abled who help us to see it.

Section 6, we're getting there. Section 6, Jesus and Alienated Women 2. And this is John 8, 1 to 11 for those of you who are thumbing through your bibles and this last

story is the loveliest. Again, it's a woman. Again, she is other abled but it's worth noticing that we nearly didn't get this story because, although it comes in John's gospel, it wasn't written by the author of this gospel, nor does it belong where we find it but someone early in the history of the church thought it too precious to lose and they put this story in which we hear the unmistakable accents of Jesus dealing with someone terribly alienated from normal civilised society and so they just shoved it in wherever they could find a place, into any old spot in the fourth gospel. And as you hear this story, you may remember the story of the pariah Bishop John was talking about this morning that was Bernadette at the time of the apparitions 150 years ago. Her father had been accused of theft, many thought she was a liar and a fake and, as you might say, they threw stones at her. But the lady down there at the grotto who described herself as "the immaculate conception" met her as she was, dealt with her courteously as one human being to another. Here's the text, "And Jesus went to the Mount of Olives and early in the morning he came back to the temple and the entire people was coming to him. He sat down and he started to teach them and the scribes and the Pharisees bring ... " you always know there's going to be trouble when you hear scribes and Pharisees, don't you ... "and the scribes and the Pharisees bring a woman who's been caught in the act of adultery." Shock, horror. "And putting her in the middle, they say to him, teach her." This woman has been caught in the very act of adultery. Now, in the Torah, Moses commanded us to stone women like this. So what about you? What do you say? They said ... I mean, the author doesn't really need to say this, I think we've worked it out but anyway I'll read what he said. "They said this by way of a test for him in order to have something to accuse him of. But Jesus bent down and, with his finger, started writing on the ground. But, as they carried on interrogating him, he looked up again and said, "The one among you who is sinless, let that one be the first to throw a stone" and he bent down once more and was writing on the ground. And when they heard this, they began to go out, one by one, starting with the eldest. And he was left alone and the woman who was in the middle. And Jesus looked up and said, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" And she said, "No one, sir" ... or you could translate that, "No one, Lord" because you can see it dawning on this woman who she's talking to. And Jesus said ... these are beautiful words ... Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. On your way and from now on, no more sin."

Well, this is just an extraordinary story and we must be very grateful to the anonymous person who inserted it into John's gospel, for we should certainly be the poorer without it. From our point of view, we need to notice that the woman is decidedly other. The religious authorities have presumably not invented the charge that she has committed adultery and presumably they've got evidence for it. Now, in that culture, it's a very serious sin, although of course you might reflect that it takes two to tango and if she really was committing adultery, there ought to be at least one other person brought before the law. But secondly, we should note that the woman is there as bait, rather as you tether ... I don't know if you ever need to do this where you come from but if you need to catch a Bengal tiger, let me tell you how it's done ... what you do is take a passing goat and you tether it to a convenient post and you put it in a clearing of the jungle and then the Bengal tiger ... be careful when you do this though because they're an endangered species ...

(LAUGHTER)

And then the Bengal tiger smells said goat and says, ah ha, lunch, and then you've got it and you can shoot it or do whatever you do with Bengal tigers. Anyway, that's what she is. She's not a real person for the religious authorities. She is a thing, a convenient way of getting at Jesus who is the real target. Jesus refuses to play their game and simply bends down and writes on the ground ... and incidentally, the suggestions as to what he might have been writing could fill a very handy library of books but we don't know what he wrote ... but they're not going to allow that option. So they keep at him, questioning. So he has to say something and his response is simply devastating and forces the authorities to confront the name of the game that they've been playing. He says, "The one among you who is sinless, let that one be the first to throw a stone". Now, there's quite a risk here of course because the authorities might have found it convenient to regard themselves as sinless but he pulls it off and his opponents slink away, led by the most senior ones.

But the story doesn't end there because for now, the woman for the first time in the story, is treated not as a tethered goat but as a person. "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" And the question brings her back home from being other. Now she's a human being to whom questions may sensibly be addressed, not

a thing about whom people talk and you've often heard ... you've often been asked when you're pushing a wheelchair, "Does it take sugar?" And then ... then, you hear those beautiful words of Jesus, "Neither do I condemn you." There, she's classed as an individual in her own right and allowed to talk and he goes deeper in his next command. "On your way and from now on, no more sin". She's set free. She whom society had imprisoned and threatened to kill ... and that's a matter for rejoicing ... but notice, she's also treated as a morally responsible adult. Jesus recognises, as he does with us, that she's done wrong and that she's chosen that path but offers her a way of living that will suffice for the rest of her life.

Now, how does that remarkable story fit into our experience here in Lourdes? You'll often have undergone some experience like that behind me in the Chapel of Reconciliation. But in ways that you may not have realised at the time, by reaching out to the very difficult or to the very marginalised or to the very other, you yourselves will have played the part of Christ here, by treating as human that which the world foolishly regards as sub human. Those other abled whom God regard not as other but as abled. This is your story and you might like to use it to think about those others who might unwillingly be separated from Jesus' table fellowship but who find themselves welcomed back when they come here to Lourdes.

Conclusion. So you can start waking up now. Nor does the list of appropriate Jesus stories end here. You could look at the way Jesus deals with all kinds of characters who might be other. Centurions, widows, children, Samaritans, even of course Pharisees with whom Jesus often appears to have dined. The point for us is an extraordinary one except that we see it in operation in Lourdes here every year. The point about the other abled is that they're both other, which means they have the possibility to threaten and to challenge us and able which means not only that they have gift of their own but also, and more profoundly, that in them the Kingdom of God really does shine forth. Remember what Paul was told when he complained about the thorn in his flesh at 2 Corinthians, 12, 9. "My grace is enough for you, my power is made perfect in weakness." And it becomes true and not just empty religious cliché, what Jesus so often said, "The Kingdom of God is within you all, among you."

When you and I overcome our fear of the other and reach out, as Jesus does, and as we manage to here in Lourdes, in love and in generosity, then not only do we see God's Kingdom irrevocably inaugurated by Jesus, we're actually living it and here therefore we are accorded a rare privilege and that privilege is the glimpse of the deepest truth of our existence. That the most important thing is love, not a sentimental love, nor the parody of love that you saw in the film that you watched last week whose proper name is not love but sentimentality or lust. And that love, that real love is the meaning of Jesus' life, is the mystery we absorb here in Lourdes and is the lesson that somehow we have to live out at home.

Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)