

**Pope John Paul II entered a hospital earlier this week with complications from the flu. The news reports that day led many people to fear the worst. The Vatican said immediately there was no cause for alarm, and ever since then John Paul has been improving steadily. Typically the secular media tend to play up stories of the pope's ill health while the Vatican plays them down. The Holy Father's health has been declining for some time. He is receiving excellent care. But he did put a scare into people this week. We pray that God will grant him the health he needs to exercise his ministry for the Church.**

**Whenever somebody we love gets sick – no matter what age they are, they suddenly become the focus of our attention. They pull out from us a depth of compassion we may not have realized was there.**

**The season of Lent begins this week. During this sacred time as a Church we refocus our attention on what needs healing inside us and in our relationships. This season aims to pull out from us a depth of compassion we may not have realized was there. Lent calls for self-denial. But it also calls for compassion. If you decrease your food, drink or luxury items, you could give what you save to someone who is needy. Sometimes a period of self-denial makes us hard to get along with, but it is supposed to make us compassionate toward others.**

**In today's first reading Isaiah makes a beautiful appeal to be compassionate. "Share your bread with the hungry," he says. "Shelter the oppressed and the homeless. Clothe the naked." That is, take care of the physical needs of others. But Isaiah also says, "Remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech." That is, treat people with respect. Compassion involves sharing, but it also means respect.**

**There is a reward for us if we do these things. Isaiah continues, "Your light shall break forth like the dawn. Your wound shall quickly be healed. Light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday." In Isaiah's day, when the sun went down, it got dark. There were no halogen streetlights. Isaiah says if you have compassion and respect for others, you will have light in the darkness.**

**We experience light every time we give to the food pantry, or tell the truth about someone falsely accused. As Jesus points out in the Sermon on the Mount, we are light for the world. When we are good disciples, we reflect the light of Christ and bring glory to the Father.**

**Winter is filled with cold, dark days when people get sick and roads get dangerous. But slowly the days are getting longer, and the chill begins to fail. Light is coming, and it warms our hearts any time we show compassion toward others. This Lent, as we do without some things ourselves, let us also do more for others. When we pray for the health of the pope, when we donate to the clothes closet, when we speak respectfully of people we may not like, we let the light of Christ shine.**