

# Day of the Sick: Praying for 'miracles of the body and the soul'

BY MARIA LUISA TORRES

Judith Abi'faraj believes in miracles. More than five years ago her now 14-year-old son Abraham was diagnosed with stage 4 neuroblastoma, with doctors offering little hope for his recovery. But through "a miracle of the Eucharist" today Abraham is a healthy and faith-filled teenager who enjoys sports, said his proud mother through happy tears.

Abi'faraj was also blessed to witness her mother's unexpected recovery from advanced breast cancer — another "miracle from God," she said, that makes her grateful every single morning. Abi'faraj shared her uplifting family stories with *The Tidings* following the third annual archdiocesan World Day of the Sick Mass, presented Feb. 8 by the Order of Malta at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

"No one chooses to be sick or infirm or disabled, but just because those things happen in our lives doesn't mean that some wonderful goodness can't come out of it," said Auxiliary Bishop Edward Clark, who presided at the concelebrated Mass, in his homily. "When we suffer patiently, when we endure frustrations, we begin to touch [the lives of others] who surround us. We begin to show them what's really important, and we give them the opportunity to minister to us in return.

"So on this day, pray for those who are ill ... but also remember to pray for the caregivers,

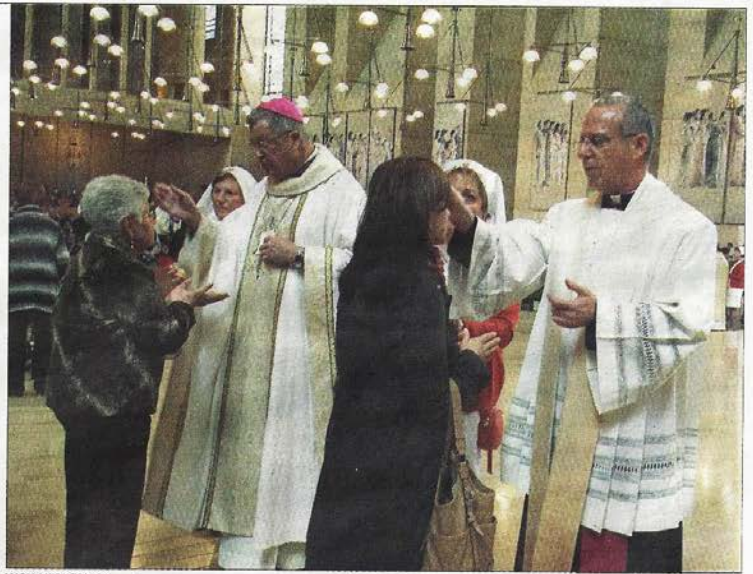


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The third annual archdiocesan World Day of the Sick Mass, presented by the Order of Malta, offered an opportunity to pray for the ill and for their caregivers.

for those who day after day care for the ill," he said. "Let us pray certainly for miracles of the body, but most especially for miracles of the soul."

For Rita Swartz, a Dame of Malta and development director for the Jeanne Jugan Residence in San Pedro run by the Little



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Bishop Edward Clark and Msgr. Kevin Kostelnik offer the Anointing of the Sick at the World Day of the Sick Mass Feb. 8 at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

Sisters of the Poor, working with the sick is always "such an inspiration."

"I'm always inspired by how humbly people have their sufferings, and sometimes they're the source of the grace; it's pretty amazing," she explained. "After a visit with a patient — sometimes I didn't even know them before — it can just bring me to tears how much I've fallen in love with them; it's very special."

During the well-attended Feb. 8 Mass,

which offered the Rite of Anointing of the Sick for those in attendance, Abi'faraj was once again praying for miracles: for her sister, who is facing surgery for kidney disease, for her father, who is battling bladder cancer, and for her own physical suffering from chronic kidney stones. But, she added, "More than anything I pray to God today for spiritual healing."

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Little Sister of the Poor Maureen O'Grady (from left), Dame of Malta Rita Swartz, Little Sister of the Poor Anthony Selewicz and Dame of Malta Mary Winzen attended the World Day of the Sick Mass Feb. 8.

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"I pray for the strength to understand that suffering is not bad, to accept whatever comes, whatever my cross is to bear," said Abi'faraj, a parishioner at St. Francis Xavier Church, Pico Rivera. "When they gave me the Anointing of the Sick, I really felt at peace. I want to take that feeling with me. I'm crying tears of joy."

Observed worldwide, the World Day of the Sick is celebrated in the Los Angeles

Archdiocese on the Saturday closest to the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes (Feb. 11). The Order of Malta — also known as the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta — is a Catholic lay religious order that ministers to the sick and poor.

Locally, the Knights and Dames of Malta provide hospitaller services through the St. Francis Center in downtown L.A., Mary Health of the Sick in Newbury Park, Santa Teresita in Duarte, the Cathedral's Outreach Center, the Order of Malta Free Clinic, and several other locations. **TD**