

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

This Sunday is Super Bowl Sunday. We kickoff this week with the Philadelphia Eagles playing the New England Patriots in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where it is expected to be a balmy nine degrees. Spectators will love leaving the cold and entering the warm indoors of US Bank Stadium (also home of the Vikings).

As the players warm up and as the spectators slowly enter the stadium everyone will be anticipating a good game. A game showcasing the pinnacle of athleticism and performance. A game made possible by the fleet of physicians, cardiologists, orthopedic surgeons, and neuro consultants working for the NFL, the stadium, and the two teams.

Because, for the players to perform at the top of human capacity requires the performance of a lot of top-notch medical staff.

Likewise, to perform in your own sanctified life requires the justifying performance of our great Physician, Jesus. Jesus, who brings with him the Kingdom of God as his own team of medical staff.

[Super Bowl Physicians]

At Super Bowl 52 the senior medical adviser will surely be standing on the sidelines at the beginning of the game. He will hear the sounds of the National Anthem sung by Pink and a fly over by the U.S. Air Force, but his mind will be elsewhere. He will be thinking about all of the logistics and preparation that went into securing and preparing for an ad hoc city to descend into US Bank Stadium. A city of 100,000 people, slightly larger than Iowa City, suddenly popping up for a week and then disappearing again.

The Super Bowl Physicians will be checking on the players, monitoring the support staff, and keeping the spectators safe.

They will be responding to fans suffering from cold exposure while waiting in lines.
They will be responding to team mascots suffering from heat exhaustion in their heavy foam costumes.

They will be covering everything from strokes to heart attacks, pulled muscles to broken bones, food poisoning to flu outbreaks, allergic reactions to stress reactions, terror attacks to spectator mobs.

In fact, in last year's Super Bowl, the senior medical adviser is even quoted as saying, "We live in a world of threats... We try to prepare for any eventuality, structural collapse, natural disasters, falls, hazardous waste. You name it, we've got it."

Last year medical staff had to deal with everything from injured hips on wet bathroom floors, to early labor pains, to broken bones, and to over 300 other incidents and hospital trips.

For all of this the Super Bowl needs some truly top-notch physicians and medical staff.

Because without the senior medical advisor and his team of medical staff, then the game could not go on. The team would suffer, the fans would suffer, the support personnel would suffer. His job is to bring healing and restoration so they all can fulfill their function. Their function to play and perform, to cheer and yell, to serve and support.

The healing care of the senior medical advisor and his staff restores the Super Bowl to perform at the top of human capacity. They don't remove the obligations of the players, the fans, or the support staff. Instead, they remove everything which damages or obstructs their human lives of service.

[*The Great Physician*]

In our Gospel reading from Mark, today, we also heard the story about how Jesus, the Great Physician, removed everything which damages or obstructs from his followers lives of sanctification.

Jesus, the Great Physician, kicked off his Super Bowl by healing Simon's mother-in-law from a fever. She lay ill in bed, fevering, and Jesus simply "took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them" (Mk 1:31). His healing touch restored her ability to serve. It restored her ability to live out a life of service to her neighbor. Her neighbor who happened, this day, to be Jesus and his disciples.

After that, the Great Physician spent all evening healing "all who were sick or oppressed by demons" (Mk 1:32). In fact, like the Super Bowl, an ad hoc "city was gathered together at the door" (Mk 1:33). Jesus, the Great Physician brought with him the Kingdom of God and the whole city wanted to get a seat.

“And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons” (Mk 1:34). All of this was because Jesus loved them and wanted to restore them. Jesus simply wanted to give these people the chance to perform at the top of human capacity.

After a long day of healing and restoration, Jesus probably slept very well that night. However, his work wasn't done and he rose very early in the morning, so he could be alone and pray.

After Jesus' disciples eventually found him, instead of going back to where he had been, he tells his disciples, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (Mk 1:38).

Did you hear that? Jesus wasn't just healing, he was preaching. He was healing through the Word of God as much as he was healing through the touch of his hand. Jesus brings with him the Word of God. Jesus brings with him the Kingdom of God.

[Senior Super Bowl Medical Advisor of Sanctification]

The Kingdom of God is here. But, the devil, the world, and our own sinful-nature ensnare us into thinking that we can do it on our own. That we don't need Jesus' help to perform. We look at all of the “good works” we've done and declare ourselves to be righteous before God.

“Surely,” the Kingdom of God awaits us, because look at all of the good things we have done. Things we have done out of selfishness, vanity, and pride. Things we have done out of deceit, and theft, and anger. Things that pour and ooze out of our sinful lives.

As we look back on our own Super Bowl performance we find that we have fumbled the ball. We have committed so many penalties that we are sitting in our own end zone. We can't even seem to get a good punt for some decent field position, because we keep dropping the ball before the kick. Our lives and our world are full of sin, we were lost in our sins before we were born. We were declared the losers just after the kick off in Adam and Eve's Garden of Eden stadium.

And yet, while we were still sinners, Jesus, the Great Physician comes and brings with him the Kingdom of God as his medical staff. He is our Senior Super Bowl Medical Advisor. He forgives us and restores us both in body and soul, not so we can live the sweet life of an NFL player, but so we can live lives of service to our neighbor.

The Kingdom of God is where God's Word is preached in its truth and purity and where the Sacraments of God are administered rightly. The Kingdom of God is here.

Jesus is here. Jesus brings with him forgiveness and restoration. He heals your hearts. He restores your soul. He removes everything that burdens and weighs you down. He heals you so that you can perform at the top of human capacity.

Jesus, the Great Physician doesn't only just heal your body. He restores you into the image of God. He restores your relationship to your creator. By declaring you just and right in the sight of God. You have the ability to perform. To perform a life of good works to your neighbor. To live a sanctified life. To continually show love and forgiveness to your neighbor because of Christ's love and forgiveness to you.

The Kingdom of God is here, but it has not yet reached its final fulfillment. Just like your lives of sanctification and good works are not yet complete, so also is the Kingdom of God.

More work is to be done.

More sins are to be forgiven.

More Baptisms are to be administered.

More communion is to be served.

More ears are being prepared to hear the Gospel message.

We preach and teach and heal, because we are the Kingdom of God here on Earth. We are Jesus, the Great Physician's, team of support staff. It is our job to heal and restore and to share Jesus with the world. To let Jesus and His Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, do what it was meant to do. To perform at the top of its divine capacity.

[Conclusion]

Jesus, the Great Physician, heals us with his forgiveness, his words, and his sacraments. The means of grace are the sign for us that Jesus brought with him the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was initiated at Christ's first coming and will reach its final fulfillment as we await Christ's second coming.

Jesus has justified you. He has forgiven your sins, declared you righteous, and restored you to life. His will is that you have the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation so that you can live out a sanctified life of service to your neighbor.

For **that** is why He came. Amen.

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)
