

Final Homily of Father Jack Hickey, O.P.
December 21, 1986, Fall River, Massachusetts

Hello good friends of Dismas House. This is Fr. Jack Hickey. Originally, I was supposed to speak to you clad in my Dominican robes at the dedication with all of you. I can just picture you all there – people of many faiths, the monks of Weston Priory, all the good workers, the residents of Dismas House, the director, the many people who have made the place become a reality that we celebrate today. Unfortunately, I speak to you from a hospital bed in Massachusetts. But, thinking from this hospital bed, of this great celebration on behalf of the new [Dismas House in Burlington](#), I realize there is some connection – because “struggle” is the key word.

When one is sick – like when one is making the difficult transition from a life of incarceration back into the fullness of society – there is a terrible, terrible, struggle that goes on. This struggle looks like courage, sometimes. I’m learning a little about this in my situation. But the courage of those who struggle must be accompanied by the compassion of those who stand with them – because courage needs the quality of compassion for it to be not just a tough withstanding of the forces of wind and weather and violence that make it difficult to survive in this world. The compassion of those who stand with those in struggle is the great vital sign of Dismas House.

So, I stand with those who are in struggle. And that means not only people coming home from prison and trying to make it in this society, but people who have struggled so hard to make Dismas happen – people on the board, the leadership, people who have worked in so many ways and have cooperated in so many ways, without who Dismas House would not be a reality today.

When I think of the people with compassion, I think of the people who stand with those in struggle, whomever they may be. And, so, I’m really speaking circularly, to all of us who struggle, from whichever vantage point, and to all of us who show compassion towards those who struggle – for we all need to be struggling and compassionate people. That is the secret Dismas formula.

We used to talk about community and students and so forth, the great mixture – and that is true. But, without those deeper spiritual elements, we would never truly understand ourselves in the Dismas enterprise.

There is a third actor that comes in when compassion stands with courage – and that is somehow, mysteriously, in that experience of courage and compassion, God’s presence is always truly there. It is perhaps felt there more than in many other places. And that brings an invitation to many other people to join in this adventure – which is an adventure of bringing God’s life, community, compassion, reconciliation, the lost art of forgiveness – to each other.

And, so, we have some of the greatest celebrators in this room today, and some of the greatest causes of celebration with us today, as we talk together at this dedication of Dismas House. So,

let us be full of joy, the spirit of complete celebration on this day, and thank God, bless God, praise God for the wonderful gift that we are receiving from Dismas House.

Father Jack passed away of stomach cancer on January 25, 1987, two weeks after recording this homily for the dedication of the Burlington Dismas House.