



**John Travaline, Doctor & Deacon**

October 18 is the Feast of St. Luke. Not only was Luke the author of one of the four Gospels, but St. Paul writes that he was a “beloved physician.” That is why, on the evening of Oct. 18, we will be holding the Gospel of Life White Mass and Banquet at the Cathedral of St. Joseph the Workman in La Crosse. The White Mass, celebrated annually by Bishop Callahan, gives the faithful the opportunity to honor the dedicated service of Catholic doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals, who take St. Luke as their patron.

We are blessed to have as this year’s keynote speaker Dr. John Travaline, a teaching surgeon, a deacon, and an expert in medical ethics as well as St. John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*. Dr. Travaline will speak on “Seeing Human Dignity through the Theology of the Body.” The Gospel of Life White Mass and Banquet is for all the faithful looking to build a Culture of Life, so his talk will be geared to a general audience.

One could hardly come up with a more appropriate time for this topic. On the one hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has made us acutely aware of the fragility of life and health, and on the other, our dominant culture has lost its understanding of the sacred identity and dignity of the human person, created in the image of God

## “Seeing Human Dignity through the Theology of the Body”

### Oct. 18 Gospel of Life White Mass & Banquet

and called to live a life of self-giving love. How can we respond?

Pope St. John Paul II has left us a treasure trove of answers in his *Theology of the Body*, which has been enriching religious formation in our Catholic schools and parishes. As a surgeon, Dr. Travaline has also drawn on this treasure trove to address both our dignity and our vulnerability as human persons. We live, love, suffer and die as bodily creatures. Medicine treats the body, and in treating the body it treats the person. Unfortunately, our culture inclines us to see our bodies as *objects* we possess, and the medical world can be susceptible to this tendency to depersonalize and manipulate the body. This is at its most extreme in abortion and assisted suicide, but it can take many other forms as well.

No, our bodies are *us*, central to our very identity. They will be raised up on the last day and we will be embodied forever. Our bodies speak a language, expressing our emotions, our choices, our generosity or selfishness. Think of a closed fist vs. an open hand, a frown vs. a smile. In Jesus’ own body He expressed self-gift to us on the cross and in the Eucharist. Likewise, we are called to make gifts of ourselves to God and one another, and we will radiate that love as embodied human creatures.

This is also true of the doctor-patient relationship. As Dr. Travaline has noted in an article he wrote: “In the interaction between healer and

patient, a communion of persons is formed. The patient makes himself vulnerable. The healer senses this and responds with gentleness and sensitivity, so as to convey both that he is grateful to the patient for allowing himself to be vulnerable, and that he is worthy of this trust.”

Sometimes, despite a doctor’s best efforts, a disease progresses and even leads to death. But even in our sufferings as embodied persons we can make a loving gift of self. As Dr. Travaline has written, “Pope John Paul II often asked patients to offer their sorrows and suffering in self-gift, for others’ intentions, especially for the Church. Suffering is never useless and can always be offered to God as a sacrifice of love, to atone for and to help other people. John Paul II himself showed us visibly how to suffer and age, as his last couple of decades were filled with physical and spiritual suffering. He did not flinch from continuing to travel and preach, even though he was afflicted with Parkinson’s disease.”

Many other insights will be shared by Dr. John Travaline at the Gospel of Life White Mass and Banquet on Oct. 18. We invite you to join us at the Cathedral! Cost is \$20, or \$10 for students, teachers and school administrators. Learn more and register at [diolc.org/gospeloflife](http://diolc.org/gospeloflife).

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