

The Cry for a Blessing

Henri Nouwen was a Dutch Catholic priest, professor, writer and theologian who learned a valuable lesson about basic human needs.

After nearly two decades of teaching at academic institutions – including the University of Notre Dame, Yale and Harvard divinity schools – Nouwen felt led to work with individuals with influential and developmental disabilities at the L'Arche Daybreak community in Richmond Hill, Ontario.

One day a woman named Janet, a member of the L'Arche community, came up to Nouwen and asked, "Henri, can you bless me?"

Nouwen made the sign of the cross on her forehead and said a short prayer. The woman wasn't satisfied. She said, "Henri, it doesn't work."

What was she talking about? His blessing didn't work?

At a worship service that evening, Nouwen tried again. He announced at the end of the service, "Janet wants a blessing." He expected her to come forward for more prayer and anointing.

Instead, Janet came forward and put her head on Nouwen's chest. He hugged her and said, "Blessed are you, Janet. You know how much we love you. You know how important you are. You know what a good woman you are."

Janet's face shone with joy. This was the blessing she'd been looking for.

The other worshipers got up from their seats and came forward, too, all requesting the same kind of blessing Janet had received. They didn't want a ritual anointing and a prayer. They wanted a hug and sincere words of love and appreciation.

Does this story have application for us? You bet it does!

In Life Care and Century Park, we serve a population of residents and patients who need a blessing – something greater than medication, personal care and rehab, as important as they are.

For most, a hug and those genuine words of love and appreciation go beyond what science can accomplish; they speak to their being valued and significant in the human race. And how important is that?

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love (1 John 4:7-8 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter