

“Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest”

3 January 2020

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the XXVIII World Day of the Sick 2020 - 11 February 2020

“Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28)

Dear brothers and sisters,

1. Jesus’ words, “Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28) point to the mysterious path of grace that is revealed to the simple and gives new strength to those who are weary and tired. These words of Christ express the solidarity of the Son of Man with all those who are hurt and afflicted. How many people suffer in both body and soul! Jesus urges everyone to draw near to him - “Come to me!” - and he promises them comfort and repose. “When Jesus says this, he has before him the people he meets every day on the streets of Galilee: very many simple people, the poor, the sick, sinners, those who are marginalized by the burden of the law and the oppressive social system... These people always followed him to hear his word, a word that gave hope! Jesus’ words always give hope!” (Angelus, 6 July 2014).

On this XXVIII World Day of the Sick, Jesus repeats these words to the sick, the oppressed, and the poor. For they realize that they depend entirely on God and, beneath the burden of their trials, stand in need of his healing. Jesus does not make demands of those who endure situations of frailty, suffering and weakness, but offers his mercy and his comforting presence. He looks upon a wounded humanity with eyes that gaze into the heart of each person. That gaze is not one of indifference; rather, it embraces people in their entirety, each person in his or her health condition, discarding no one, but rather inviting everyone to share in his life and to experience his tender love.

2. Why does Jesus have these feelings? Because he himself became frail, endured human suffering and received comfort from his Father. Indeed, only those who personally experience suffering are then able to comfort others. There are so many kinds of grave suffering: incurable and chronic diseases, psychological diseases, situations calling for rehabilitation or palliative care, numerous forms of disability, children’s or geriatric diseases... At times human warmth is lacking in our approach to these. What is needed is a personalized approach to the sick, not just of curing but also of caring, in view of an integral human healing. In experiencing illness, individuals not only feel threatened in their physical integrity, but also in the relational, intellectual, affective and spiritual dimensions of their lives. For this reason, in addition to therapy and support, they expect care and attention. In a word, love. At the side of every sick person, there is also a family, which itself suffers and is in need of support and comfort.

3. Dear brothers and sisters who are ill, your sickness makes you in a particular way one of those “who labour and are burdened”, and thus attract the eyes and heart of Jesus. In him, you will find light to brighten your darkest moments and hope to soothe your distress. He urges you: “Come to me”. In him, you will find strength to face all the worries and questions that assail you during this “dark night” of body and soul. Christ did not give us prescriptions, but through his passion, death and resurrection he frees us from the grip of evil.

In your experience of illness, you certainly need a place to find rest. The Church desires to become more and more the “inn” of the Good Samaritan who is Christ (cf. Lk 10:34), that is, a home where you can encounter his grace, which finds expression in closeness, acceptance and relief. In this home, you can meet people who, healed in their frailty by God’s mercy, will help you bear your cross and enable your suffering to give you a new perspective. You will be able to look beyond your illness to a greater horizon of new light and fresh strength for your lives.

A key role in this effort to offer rest and renewal to our sick brothers and sisters is played by healthcare workers: physicians, nurses, medical and administrative professionals, assistants and volunteers. Thanks to their expertise, they can make patients feel the presence of Christ who consoles and cares for the sick, and heals every hurt. Yet they too are men and women with their own frailties and even illnesses. They show how true it is that “once Christ’s comfort and rest is received, we are called in turn to become rest and comfort for our brothers and sisters, with a docile and humble attitude in imitation of the Teacher” (Angelus, 6 July 2014).

4. Dear healthcare professionals, let us always remember that diagnostic, preventive and therapeutic

treatments, research, care and rehabilitation are always in the service of the sick person; indeed the noun “person” takes priority over the adjective “sick”. In your work, may you always strive to promote the dignity and life of each person, and reject any compromise in the direction of euthanasia, assisted suicide or suppression of life, even in the case of terminal illness.

When confronted with the limitations and even failures of medical science before increasingly problematic clinical cases and bleak diagnoses, you are called to be open to the transcendent dimension of your profession that reveals its ultimate meaning. Let us remember that life is sacred and belongs to God; hence it is inviolable and no one can claim the right to dispose of it freely (cf. *Donum Vitae*, 5; *Evangelium Vitae*, 29-53). Life must be welcomed, protected, respected and served from its beginning to its end: both human reason and faith in God, the author of life, require this. In some cases, conscientious objection becomes a necessary decision if you are to be consistent with your “yes” to life and to the human person. Your professionalism, sustained by Christian charity, will be the best service you can offer for the safeguarding of the truest human right, the right to life. When you can no longer provide a cure, you will still be able to provide care and healing, through gestures and procedures that give comfort and relief to the sick.

Tragically, in some contexts of war and violent conflict, healthcare professionals and the facilities that receive and assist the sick are attacked. In some areas, too, political authorities attempt to manipulate medical care for their own advantage, thus restricting the medical profession’s legitimate autonomy. Yet attacking those who devote themselves to the service of the suffering members of society does not serve the interests of anyone.

5. On this XXVIII World Day of the Sick, I think of our many brothers and sisters throughout the world who have no access to medical care because they live in poverty. For this reason, I urge healthcare institutions and government leaders throughout the world not to neglect social justice out of a preoccupation for financial concerns. It is my hope that, by joining the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, efforts will be made to cooperate in ensuring that everyone has access to suitable treatments for preserving and restoring their health. I offer heartfelt thanks to all those volunteers who serve the sick, often compensating for structural shortcomings, while reflecting the image of Christ, the Good Samaritan, by their acts of tender love and closeness.

To the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, I entrust all those who bear the burden of illness, along with their families and all healthcare workers. With the assurance of a remembrance in my prayers, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 3 January 2020

Memorial of the Most Holy Name of Jesus

Francis