

Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus: Jesus, physician and brother

22 June 2019

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC) gathered in Rome to celebrate their consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Pope Francis

Saturday, 22 June 2019

Your Eminence, dear President, dear brothers and sisters,

I offer you a cordial welcome and I thank Cardinal Turkson for his kind words. I am impressed that at this meeting you wanted to make a special act of consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Please know of my prayers that this will prove spiritually fruitful for each of you. I would now like to share with you a few simple thoughts.

The earliest Christian communities often spoke of the Lord Jesus as a “physician”, highlighting in this way his constant, compassionate concern for those suffering from every kind of illness. His mission consisted above all in *drawing near* to the sick and the disabled, especially to those who for that reason were looked down upon and marginalized. Jesus thus overturned the sentence of condemnation that so often labelled the sick person as a sinner. By his compassionate closeness, Jesus showed the infinite love of God our Father for his children most in need.

Care for the sick emerges, then, as an *essential* aspect of Christ’s mission and, consequently, of the Church’s mission as well. The Gospels show a clear link between Jesus’ preaching and the acts of healing that he performed for all those who were, in Matthew’s words, “afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics” (4:24).

Important too is the way that Jesus cared for the sick and suffering. He often touched those persons and let them touch him, even in cases where it was forbidden. This was the case, for example, with the woman who had suffered for years from haemorrhages. Jesus sensed that he had been touched and that healing power had gone forth from him, and when the woman fell to her knees and confessed what she had done, he said to her: “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace” (Lk 8:48).

For Jesus, then, healing involves *drawing near to the person*, even if at times there were some who would prevent him from doing so, as in the case of the blind Bartimaeus in Jericho. Jesus had the man brought before him and asked: “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mk 10:51). It might surprise us that the “physician” should ask the patient what he expects from him! Yet this highlights the importance of words and dialogue in a relationship of care. For Jesus, care entails entering into dialogue, in order to bring out the individual’s own desire and the soothing power of God’s love working through his Son. Caregiving means starting a process: a process of relief, consolation, reconciliation and healing. When care is given with genuine love for the other, it expands the horizons of the recipient, for human beings are a unity: a unity of spirit, soul and body. We can see this clearly in the ministry of Jesus. He never heals just one part, but rather the *whole* person, integrally. At times, he starts with the body, at other times with the heart – by forgiving sins (cf. Mt 2:5), but always for the sake of restoring the whole.

Finally, Jesus’ care involves *raising up* and then *sending forth* those whom he has drawn near to and healed. Many of the sick who were cured by Christ then became his disciples and followers.

In a word, Jesus draws near, shows concern, heals, reconciles, calls and sends forth. It is obvious that, for him, a relationship with persons afflicted by illness and infirmity is one both personal and profound. Not a mechanical relationship, not a distant one.

It is to this school of Jesus, physician and brother to the suffering, that *you*, as physicians, believers and members of the Church, *have been called*. You are called to draw near to those experiencing the suffering brought on by illness.

You are called to provide care with sensitivity and with respect for the dignity and for the physical and psychological integrity of each person.

You are called to listen attentively and to respond appropriately, in addition to the physical care you provide. This will make the latter all the more humane and, consequently, all the more effective.

You are called to offer encouragement and comfort, to raise up and to give hope. Care cannot really be given or received in the absence of hope. In this sense, all of us need hope. We are grateful to God who grants us that hope. But also grateful to all those who are engaged in medical research.

The last hundred years have seen immense progress in this area. New therapies and numerous experimental treatments have developed, forms of care that would have been unimaginable in earlier generations. We can and should alleviate suffering, while at the same time teaching people to become more responsible for their own health and the health of their relatives and friends. And we must remember too, that the work of caring for others also entails respect for the gift of life from beginning to end. For we are not the masters of life; it is given to us in trust, and physicians stand at its service.

Your mission is a witness of humanity, a privileged means of helping others to see and feel that God our Father cares for every individual, without distinction. To do this, he wishes to employ our knowledge, our hands and our hearts, in order to care for and bring healing to every human being. To each of us he wants to grant life and love.

All this requires of you competence, patience, spiritual strength and fraternal solidarity. The way you fulfil your mission as Catholic physicians should unite professionalism with the capacity for teamwork and ethical integrity. This will benefit both the patient and the environment in which you carry out your work. Very often – as we know – the quality of a hospital ward depends not merely on the sophistication of its technology, but on the level of professionalism and humanity shown by the head physician and the medical team. We see this every day, many ordinary people who go to hospital: “I want to see this doctor, or that one” – why? Because they sense their closeness, their dedication.

By constant spiritual renewal and by drawing from the wellspring of God’s word and the sacraments, you will accomplish your mission well. The Holy Spirit will grant you the gift of discernment needed to confront sensitive and complex situations, and to say the right things in the right way, and with the right silence, at the right time.

Dear brothers and sisters, I know that you are already doing it, but I urge you also to pray for your patients and for all your colleagues and assistants. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!