

Consider humans in their entirety and uniqueness

16 October 2024

Greeting to members of the Italian Society of Surgery

Pope Francis

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning.

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the 126th National Congress of the Italian Society of Surgery, entitled “The future of the surgeon – the surgeon of the future”, taking place here in Rome. I warmly greet the President of the Society, the members of the Council and all of you.

Those who speak of the future, speak of hope, planning, commitment. You have developed a good theme! And in this sense, your work is precious for man, who is a beautiful and fragile creature, a creature eager for life and future and at the same time so vulnerable. Therefore, it is important that your style always be humane and professional, of those who take care of the suffering, so that first and foremost you take them to heart, combining competence and deontology in all your interventions, according to the culture of health, which is a service to the person in his or her entirety. Think of the future of the surgeon as starting out from a culture of devotion to one’s brother, especially if he is poor and marginalized. It is always the person who lives and dies, who suffers and heals, not only their organs or tissues.

On the contrary, there is the risk, even for doctors, of losing their vocation, placing themselves outside that therapeutic alliance, which places the sick or wounded person at the centre. Indeed, at times modern medicine tends to concentrate a great deal on the physical dimension of the person, rather than considering them in their entirety and uniqueness. In this way, however, the body becomes a naked object of scientific investigation and technical manipulation, to the detriment of the patient, who takes second place. Instead, science is for humankind, not humankind for science! A human science.

Today, in a time in which surgery has many new technologies at its disposal, including artificial intelligence, it is good never to forget that nothing can substitute the “hand” of the surgeon. Surgery means “work done with the hand”, “operation of the hand”. And that is exactly what it is: in order to heal, surgeons must wound, cut. Therefore, when you have the body of a person in your hands, created in the image of God, act as “artisans of health”, working on others with the same care with which you yourself would wish to be treated. Reflect on the gestures which, as professionals, you carry out, together, as a team with your co-workers, and do not be afraid to promote, especially among the young, a human, scientific, technological and psychological formation: this is where the best characteristics of future surgeons will come from.

Your work and your mission will always be highly important: therefore, I invite you to be guardians of the life of those who suffer – guardians of the life of those who suffer. Even when a person cannot be healed, they can always be cared for, so that no-one is ever considered or made to feel rejected.

In this regard, esteemed surgeons, I would like to conclude by giving you an icon that can inspire the future of your profession: the icon of Jesus, doctor of souls and bodies – or rather, of the person as a whole – narrated in the parable of the good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:30-37). In this, he who takes care sees and stops without hurrying by: he has compassion towards the man he meets, he approaches him and he binds his wounds. See, he has compassion, he approaches, and he binds the wounds. These are the attitudes I recommend to you: see with love, feel compassion, draw close and take care. This is how every good doctor becomes a neighbour to the patient.

Thank you for everything you do, even with great sacrifices. I encourage you to dedicate yourselves with passion to suffering humanity, of which we are all a part.

May Mary, health of the sick, accompany your service, comforting you in the hardships of work and research. I bless every one of you, your families and all the healthcare professionals who collaborate with your Society. And please, do not forget to pray for me: but pray for me... Thank you.