

Health is not a luxury!

16 January 2023

Address to representatives of the National Federation of the Associations of Medical Radiology Health Technicians and Technical, Rehabilitation and Prevention Health Professions

Pope Francis

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the president for her words of greeting. You represent thousands of healthcare professionals: so this meeting gives me the opportunity to reiterate my closeness and gratitude for what you do every day. I would like to thank you for your commitment and dedication, especially when they are hidden. Health professionals, over the past three years, have had a very special experience, one that is difficult to imagine, that of the pandemic. It has been said before, but it must not be forgotten: without your commitment and labours, many sick people would not have been cured. Your sense of duty inspired by the power of love has enabled you to serve your neighbour, even putting your own health at risk. And with you, I thank all the other healthcare workers.

In less than a month's time, 11 February, will mark World Day of the Sick, which also always invites reflection on the experience of illness. This is all the more appropriate today, indeed necessary, because often the culture of efficiency and rejection "pushes" us to sweep it under the carpet, leaving no room for human frailty. In this way, when evil bursts onto the scene and wounds us, we are left stunned. Moreover, others might abandon us at such times. Or, in our own moments of weakness, we may feel that we should abandon others in order to avoid becoming a burden. This is how loneliness sets in" (Message for the 31st World Day of the Sick).

The culture of care, personified by the good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37) acts in the opposite direction. He does not look away; he approaches the wounded man with compassion and takes care of that person the others had ignored. This parable shows a precise line of behaviour: it "shows us how a community can be rebuilt by men and women who identify with the vulnerability of others, who reject the creation of a society of exclusion, and act instead as neighbours, lifting up and rehabilitating the fallen for the sake of the common good" (Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 67).

Dear friends, your profession stems from a choice of values. With your service, you contribute to "lifting up and rehabilitating" your patients, remembering that first and foremost they are people. Indeed, the person should always be at the centre, with all his or her components, including the spiritual; a unified totality, in which the biological and spiritual, cultural and relational, planning and environmental dimensions of the human being are harmonized in the course of life. This principle, which is at the root of the ethical Constitution of your Federation, guides your path and makes it possible not to give in to a sterile focus on efficiency or a cold application of protocols. The sick are people who ask to be cured and to feel they are cared for, and therefore it is important to relate to them with humanity and empathy. Certainly, with a high professional level, but with humanity and empathy.

But you too, healthcare professionals, are people, and you need someone to take care of you, through the recognition of your service, the protection of adequate working conditions and the involvement of an appropriate number of carers, so that the right to healthcare for all is recognized. It is up to each country to seek "strategies and resources in order to guarantee each person's fundamental right to basic and decent healthcare" (Message for the 31st World Day of the Sick). Health is not a luxury! A world that discards the sick, that does not assist those who cannot afford care, is a cynical world without a future. Let us always remember this: health is not a luxury, it is for all.

I urge you to look always to ethical values as an indispensable point of reference for your professions. Indeed, if assimilated well and joined with scientific knowledge and the necessary skills, values enable you to accompany the people entrusted to you in the best way.

Dear brothers and sisters, may you be accompanied by the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, whom the Gospel presents as a caring woman, rushing to help her relative Elizabeth. May she watch over you and your work. I bless you and your families from my heart. And I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you!