

International Nurses Day 2020

12 May 2020

Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to mark International Nurses Day

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate International Nurses Day, in the context of the International Year of Nurses and Midwives officially declared by the World Health Organization. At this same time, we observe the bicentennial of the birth of Florence Nightingale, the pioneer of modern nursing.

At this critical moment, marked by the global health emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we have rediscovered the fundamental importance of the role being played by nurses and midwives. Every day we witness the testimony of courage and sacrifice of healthcare workers, and nurses in particular, who, with professionalism, self-sacrifice, and a sense of responsibility and love for neighbour, assist people affected by the virus, even to the point of putting their own health at risk. Sadly, this can be seen in the high number of healthcare workers who have died as a result of their faithful service. I pray for them – the Lord knows each of them by name – and for all the victims of this epidemic. May the Risen Lord grant to each of them the light of heaven and to their families the consolation of faith.

Nurses have historically played a central role in health care. Every day, in their contact with the sick, they experience the trauma caused by suffering in people's lives. They are men and women who have chosen to say "yes" to a very special vocation: that of being good Samaritans who are concerned for the life and suffering of others. They are guardians and preservers of life, who, even as they administer necessary treatments, offer courage, hope and trust.[1]

Dear nurses, moral responsibility is the hallmark of your professional service, which cannot be reduced to scientific-technical knowledge alone, but must be constantly inspired by your human and humanizing relationship with the sick. "Taking care of women and men, of children and elderly, in every phase of their life, from birth to death, you are tasked with continuous listening, aimed at understanding what the needs of that patient are, in the phase that he or she is experiencing. Before the uniqueness of each situation, indeed, it is never enough to follow a protocol, but a constant – and tiresome! – effort of discernment and attention to the individual person is required".[2]

You – and here I think too of midwives – are close to people at crucial moments in their existence – birth and death, disease and healing – helping them deal with traumatic situations. Sometimes you find yourself at their side as they are dying, giving comfort and relief in their last moments. Because of your dedication, you are among the "saints next door".[3] You are an image of the Church as a "field hospital" that continues to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ, who drew near to and healed people with all kinds of sickness and who stooped down to wash the feet of his disciples. Thank you for your service to humanity!

In many countries, the pandemic has also brought to light a number of deficiencies in the provision of health care. For this reason, I would ask leaders of nations throughout the world to invest in health care as the primary common good, by strengthening its systems and employing greater numbers of nurses, so as to ensure adequate care to everyone, with respect for the dignity of each person. It is important to recognize in an effective way the essential role your profession plays in patient care, local emergency activity, disease prevention, health promotion, and assistance in family, community and school settings.

Nurses, as well as midwives, deservedly have the right to be better and more fully valued and involved in processes concerning the health of individuals and communities. It has been shown that investing in them improves overall care and health. Their professionalism should thus be enhanced by providing suitable scientific, human, psychological and spiritual tools for their training, by improving their working conditions and by guaranteeing their rights, so that they can carry out their service in full dignity.

In this regard, associations of healthcare workers play an important role. In addition to offering comprehensive training, they support their individual members, making them feel part of a larger body, never dismayed and alone as they face the ethical, economic and human challenges that their profession entails.

I would like to say a special word to midwives who assist women in their pregnancies and help them give birth to their children. Your work is among the most noble of professions, for it is directly dedicated to the service of life and of motherhood. In the Bible, the names of two heroic midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, are immortalized in the Book of Exodus (cf. 1:15-21). Today, too, the heavenly Father looks to you with gratitude.

Dear nurses, dear midwives, may this annual celebration highlight the dignity of your work for the benefit of the health of society as a whole. With the assurance of my prayers for you, your families and those for whom you care, I cordially impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

Rome, from Saint John Lateran, 12 May 2020

Francis