

The compassion of the Samaritan: loving by bearing another's pain

13 January 2026

Message for the 34th World Day of the Sick 2026, 11 February 2026

Pope Leo XIV

Dear brothers and sisters,

The thirty-fourth World Day of the Sick will be solemnly celebrated in Chiclayo, Peru, on 11 February 2026. For this occasion, I would recommend reflecting once again on the figure of the Good Samaritan, for he is always relevant and essential for rediscovering the beauty of charity and the social dimension of compassion. This reflection further directs our attention towards the needy and all those who suffer, especially the sick.

We are all familiar with the moving account found in the Gospel of Saint Luke (cf. Lk 10:25-37). Jesus responds to a scholar of the law, who asks him to identify the neighbor he must love, with this story: a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by robbers and left for dead. While a priest and a Levite passed him by, a Samaritan took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, took him to an inn and provided for his care. I have chosen to reflect on this biblical passage through the lens of the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, written by my beloved predecessor Pope Francis. There, compassion and mercy towards those in need are not reduced to a merely individual effort, but are realized through relationships: with our brothers and sisters in need, with those who care for them and, ultimately, with God who gives us his love.

1. The gift of encounter: the joy of offering closeness and presence

We live immersed in a culture of speed, immediacy and haste – a culture of “discard” and indifference that prevents us from pausing along the way and drawing near to acknowledge the needs and suffering that surround us. In the parable, when the Samaritan saw the wounded man, he did not “pass by.” Instead, he looked upon him with an open and attentive gaze – the very gaze of Jesus – which led him to act with human and compassionate closeness. The Samaritan “stopped, approached the man and cared for him personally, even spending his own money to provide for his needs... [Above all] he gave him his time.” [1: Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 63.] Jesus does not merely teach us who our neighbor is, but rather how to become a neighbor; in other words, how we can draw close to others. [2: Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 80-82.] In this respect, we can affirm with Saint Augustine that the Lord did not intend to show us who that man’s neighbor was, but rather to whom he should become a neighbor. Indeed, no one is truly a neighbor until they freely draw near to another. Thus, the one who became a neighbor was the one who showed mercy. [3: Cf. Saint Augustine, *Serm.* 171, 2; 179/A, 7.]

Love is not passive; it goes out to meet the other. Being a neighbor is not determined by physical or social proximity, but by the decision to love. This is why Christians become neighbors to those who suffer, following the example of Christ, the true divine Samaritan who drew near to a wounded humanity. These are not mere gestures of philanthropy, but signs through which we perceive that personal participation in another’s suffering involves the gift of oneself. It means going beyond the simple satisfaction of needs, so that our very person becomes part of the gift. [4: Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 34; Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* (11 February 1984), 28.] This kind of charity is necessarily nourished by an encounter with Christ, who gave himself for us out of love. Saint Francis expressed this beautifully when, speaking of his encounter with lepers, he said: “The Lord himself led me among them,” [5: Saint Francis of Assisi, *The Testament*, 2: *Fonti Francescane*, 110.] because through them he had discovered the sweet joy of loving.

The gift of encounter flows from our union with Jesus Christ. We recognize him as the Good Samaritan who has brought us eternal salvation, and we make him present whenever we reach out to a wounded brother or sister. Saint Ambrose said: “Since no one is more truly our neighbor than he who has healed our wounds, let us love him as Lord and also as neighbor; for nothing is so close as the head to its members. Let us also love those who imitate Christ; let us love those who suffer due to the poverty of others, for the sake of the unity of the Body.” [6: Saint Ambrose, *Treatise on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, VII, 84.] “To be one in the One” – through closeness, presence, and love received and shared – is to rejoice, like Saint Francis, in the sweetness of having encountered the Lord.

2. The shared mission of caring for the sick

Saint Luke continues, noting that the Samaritan “was moved with pity.” Compassion, in this sense, implies a profound emotion that compels us to act. It is a feeling that springs from within and leads to a committed response to another’s suffering. In this parable, compassion is the defining characteristic of active love; it is neither theoretical nor merely sentimental, but manifests itself through concrete gestures. The Samaritan drew near, tended the wounds, took charge and provided care. Notably, he does not act in isolation: “The Samaritan discovered an innkeeper who would care for the man; we too are called to unite as a family that is stronger than the sum of small individual members.” [7: Francis, Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti (3 October 2020), 78.] In my experience as a missionary and bishop in Peru, I have personally witnessed many who show mercy and compassion in the spirit of the Samaritan and the innkeeper. Family members, neighbors, healthcare workers, those engaged in pastoral care for the sick, and many others stop along the way to draw near, heal, support and accompany those in need. By offering what they have, they give compassion a social dimension. This experience, occurring within a network of relationships, transcends mere individual commitment. For this reason, in the Apostolic Exhortation Dilexi Te, I referred to the care of the sick not only as an “important part” of the Church’s mission, but as an authentic “ecclesial action” (n. 49). I quoted Saint Cyprian to illustrate how this dimension serves as a measure of a society’s health: “This pestilence and plague, which seems so horrible and deadly, searches out the righteousness of each one, and examines the minds of the human race, to see whether the healthy serve the sick; whether relatives love each other with sincerity; whether masters have pity on their sick servants; whether doctors do not abandon the sick who beg for help.” [8: Saint Cyprian, De mortalitate, 16.]

“To be one in the One” means truly recognizing that we are members of a single Body that brings the Lord’s compassion to the suffering of all people, each according to our own vocation. [9: Cf. Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris (11 February 1984), 24.] Moreover, the pain that moves us to compassion is not the pain of a stranger; it is the pain of a member of our own Body, to whom Christ our Head commands us attend, for the good of all. In this sense, our service is identified with Christ’s own suffering and, when offered in a Christian spirit, hastens the fulfillment of the Savior’s prayer for the unity of all. [10: Cf. Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris (11 February 1984), 31.]

3. Always driven by love for God, to encounter ourselves and our neighbor

In the double commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Lk 10:27), we recognize the primacy of love for God and its direct consequences for every dimension of human love and relationship. “Love for our neighbor is tangible proof of the authenticity of our love for God, as the Apostle John attests: ‘No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us... God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them’ (1 Jn 4:12, 16).” [11: Apostolic Exhortation Dilexi Te (4 October 2025), 26.] Although the object of this love differs – God, neighbor and oneself – and can be understood as distinct expressions of love, they remain fundamentally inseparable. [12: Apostolic Exhortation Dilexi Te (4 October 2025), 26.] The primacy of divine love implies that human action is carried out not for self-interest or reward, but as a manifestation of a love that transcends ritual norms and find expression in authentic worship. To serve one’s neighbor is to love God through deeds. [13: Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti (3 October 2020), 79.]

This perspective also allows us to grasp the true meaning of loving ourselves. It means setting aside any attempt to base our self-esteem or sense of dignity on worldly stereotypes – such as success, career, status or family background [14: Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti (3 October 2020), 101.] – and recovering our proper place before God and neighbor. Benedict XVI observed, “as a spiritual being, the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations. The more authentically he or she lives these relations, the more his or her own personal identity matures. It is not by isolation that man establishes his worth, but by placing himself in relation with others and with God.” [15: Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate (29 June 2009), 53.]

Dear brothers and sisters, “the true remedy for humanity’s wounds is a style of life based on fraternal love, which has its root in love of God.” [16: Francis, Message to Participants in the 33rd International Youth Festival (MLADIFEST), Medjugorje, 1-6 August 2022 (16 July 2022).] I genuinely hope that our Christian lifestyle will always reflect this fraternal, “Samaritan” spirit – one that is welcoming, courageous, committed and supportive, rooted in our union with God and our faith in Jesus Christ. Enkindled by this divine love, we will surely be able to give of ourselves for the good of all who suffer, especially our brothers and sisters who are sick, elderly or afflicted.

Let us raise our prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, asking her to assist all who suffer and are in need of compassion, consolation and a listening ear. Let us seek her intercession with this ancient prayer, that has been invoked in families for those living with illness and pain:

Sweet Mother, do not part from me.
Turn not your eyes away from me.
Walk with me at every moment
and never leave me alone.
You who always protect me
as a true Mother,
obtain for me the blessing of the Father,
Son and Holy Spirit.

I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to all who are sick, to their families and to those who care for them - healthcare workers and pastoral workers alike - and in a special way to all participating in this World Day of the Sick.

From the Vatican, 13 January 2026