

Three antidotes for health care

4 June 2022

Address to the members of the Federsanità Confederation

Pope Francis

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Dear friends, welcome!

I thank the President for her words. She quoted Saint Giuseppe Moscati, truly a “good Samaritan” who knew how to embody a style of integral care, in the territory. Your Confederation, which brings together local health authorities, hospitals, and scientific hospitalization and treatment institutes, together with representatives of the Association of Italian Municipalities, also has a strong link with the territory, in a continuous dynamic of exchange between local, regional and national levels. With your efforts, you contribute to maintaining the relationship between center and periphery, between small and large, weaving relationships and promoting pathways of socio-healthcare and socio-welfare integration.

Precisely from the identity of your confederation, I would like to propose three “antidotes” that can help you the path you have charted.

First, *proximity*: it is the antidote to self-referentiality. Proximity. Seeing in the patient another self breaks the chains of selfishness, topples the pedestal on which we are sometimes tempted to climb and prompts us to recognize ourselves as brothers and sisters, regardless of language, geographical origin, social status or health condition. If we are able to perceive the people we meet in hospital wards, nursing homes, and outpatient clinics, primarily as brothers and sisters, everything changes: “taking charge” of them ceases to be a bureaucratic matter and becomes an encounter, accompaniment, sharing. Our God is the God of proximity. Indeed, he presented himself as such: in Deuteronomy he said: “What nation is there that has a god so near to it?”. Proximity, closeness. Our God, who is the God of proximity, chose to take on our flesh; he is not a distant, unreachable God. He walks with us, on the bumpy roads of this world, as he did with the disciples of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-32), who listens to the confusion, the anguish, the cry of pain of each person. He asks us to do the same. And this is all the more important when we find ourselves in sickness and suffering. Becoming close to others also means breaking down distances, making sure that there are no first- and second-class patients, committing energies and resources so that no one is excluded from social and health care. And this brings us to what the president reminded us about public healthcare: when a country loses this wealth that is public healthcare, it begins to make distinctions within the population between those who have access, who can have paid healthcare, and those who are left without healthcare services. Therefore, it is a wealth of yours, here in Italy, public healthcare: do not lose it, please, do not lose it!

Here then is the second antidote: *wholeness*, which is opposed to fragmentation and partiality. If everything is connected, we must also rethink the concept of health from a holistic perspective, embracing all dimensions of the person. Without detracting from the value of specific expertise, healing a sick person means considering not only a certain pathology, but his or her psychological, social, cultural and spiritual condition. When Jesus heals someone, He not only eradicates the physical ailment from the body, but also restores dignity, reintroducing him or her into society, giving a new life. Of course, only He can do this, but the attitude, the approach to the person is model for us. A holistic view of care helps counter the “throwaway culture” which excludes those who, for various reasons, do not meet certain standards. In a society that is in danger of seeing the sick as a burden, a cost, we need to restore to the centre that which is priceless and cannot be bought or sold, that is, the dignity of the person. Illnesses may mark the body, confuse thoughts, take away strength, but they can never nullify the value of human life, which must always be protected, from conception to its natural end. I hope that research and the various health professions will always have this outlook.

And the third antidote is the *common good*, as a remedy to the pursuit of partisan interests. Even in the field of healthcare, the temptation to make the economic or political interests of one group prevail at the expense of the majority of the population. And this applies also on the level of international relations. The fundamental right to healthcare – I quote from the New Charter for Healthcare Workers – “pertains to the value of justice, whereby there are no distinctions between peoples and ethnic groups, taking into account their objective living conditions, and stages of development, in pursuing the common good, which is at the same time the good of all and of each individual” (no. 141). The pandemic has taught us that “every man for himself” translates rapidly into “everyone against all”, widening the gap of inequality and increasing conflict. Instead, it is necessary to work to ensure that everyone has access to care, that the healthcare system is supported and promoted, and

that it continues to be free of charge. Cutting resources for healthcare is an outrage to humanity.

Proximity, wholeness and the common good: I give you these “antidotes”, encouraging you to continue to work in the service of the sick and for the whole of society. May Saint Giuseppe Moscati guide you in your daily work and give you the wisdom of caring and protecting. I bless you from my heart and entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!