

To health care workers: “You show us the maternal face of God”

21 November 2019

Meeting with the medical staff of St. Louis Hospital

Pope Francis

Bangkok, 21 November 2019

Dear Friends,

I am happy to have this opportunity to meet you, the medical, nursing and support staff of St. Louis Hospital and other Catholic hospitals and charitable agencies. I thank the Director for his kind words of introduction. It is a blessing for me to witness at first hand this valuable service that the Church offers to the Thai people, especially to those most in need. With affection, I greet the Sisters of Saint Paul of Chartres and all the other women religious present today, and I thank them for their quiet and joyful dedication to this apostolate over these many years. You enable us to contemplate the maternal face of God who bends down to anoint and raise up his children: thank you.

I was pleased to hear the Director speak of the principle by which this Hospital operates: *Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est* – where love is, there God is. It is precisely in the exercise of charity that we Christians are called not only to demonstrate that we are missionary disciples, but also to take stock of our own fidelity, and that of our institutions, to the demands of that discipleship. “Truly, I say to you”, says the Lord, “all that you have done to one of these my little brothers, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). You are missionary disciples in the field of health care, for you open your hearts to “a mystical fraternity, a contemplative fraternity, capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbour, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common by clinging to the love of God, of opening the heart to divine love and seeking the happiness of others, just as their heavenly Father does” (Evangelii Gaudium, 92).

Seen in this way, you carry out one of the greatest works of mercy, for your commitment to health care goes far beyond the simple and praiseworthy practice of medicine. This is not only a matter of procedures and programs; rather, it has to do with our readiness to embrace whatever each new day sets before us. It is about welcoming and embracing human life as it arrives at the Hospital’s emergency room, needing to be treated with the merciful care born of love and respect for the dignity of each human person. The healing process should rightly be seen as a powerful anointing capable of restoring human dignity in every situation, a gaze that grants dignity and provides support.

All of you, as members of this hospital community, are missionary disciples whenever you look at your patients and you learn to call them by name. I know that at times your service can prove burdensome and tiring; you work under extreme circumstances, and for this reason you need to be accompanied and supported in your work. This speaks to us of the need for a health care ministry in which not only patients but every member of this community can feel cared for and supported in his or her mission. Please know that your efforts and the work of the many institutions that you represent are a living testimony of the care and concern that all of us are called to show to everyone, especially the elderly, the young and those most vulnerable.

This year St. Louis Hospital celebrates the 120th anniversary of its foundation. How many people have received relief from their pain, comfort in their sorrow and companionship in their loneliness! As I give thanks to God for the gift of your presence over these years, I ask you to ensure that this and similar apostolates may increasingly become a sign and emblem of a Church on the move, which, in carrying out her mission, finds the courage to bring Christ’s healing love to all those who suffer.

At the end of this meeting, I will be visiting the sick and the disabled, as a way of accompanying them, however briefly, in their pain.

Each of us knows how illness brings with it questions that dig deep. Our first reaction may be to rebel and even experience moments of bewilderment and desolation. We cry out in pain, and rightly so: Jesus himself shared in that suffering and made it his own. With prayer, we too want to join in his own cry of pain.

By uniting ourselves to Jesus in his passion, we discover the power of his closeness to our frailty and our wounds. We are invited to cling to him and to his sacrifice. If at times we feel deeply “the bread of adversity and the water of affliction”, let us also pray that we can find, in an outstretched hand, the help needed to discover the comfort that comes from “the Lord who does not hide himself” (cf. Is 30:20), but remains ever close to us

and accompanies us at every moment.

Let us place this meeting and our lives under the protective mantle of Mary. May she turn her eyes of mercy toward you, especially at times of pain, illness and vulnerability. May she obtain for you the grace of encountering her Son in the wounded flesh of all those whom you serve.

I bless all of you and your families. And I ask you, please, not to forget to pray for me.

Thank you!