



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN AUSTRALIA

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SICK AND THE HANDICAPPED**

*Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Sports Centre
Brisbane (Australia), 25 November 1986*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us, I greet you with deep affection. My pilgrimage would not be complete without an opportunity to visit those who are handicapped, disabled or ill. A visit such as this always has a special place in my heart, because it focuses on a mysterious truth which is at the heart of the mystery of the Church. This mysterious truth is found in Saint Paul's description of what God revealed to him when he said: "My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection".

To speak of disability, handicaps and illness is to speak of the weakness of our human condition. No one born into this world is free from human frailty – whether it be physical, emotional or spiritual. Each of us must personally come to terms with this frailty. Sometimes we may wish for a kind of life that is easier than the one we have. Perhaps some of you who are physically handicapped, disabled or ill may ask God why you have been singled out for a life that is different from the lives of other people. But in the providence of God a different life does not mean a less important life. It does not mean a life with less potential for holiness or for contributing to the well-being of the world.

Questions and worries are also shared by your families and loved ones. They too face the challenges and crosses that are part of your lives, as well as the opportunities and blessings. To them too I offer my encouragement and support. The Church knows that she must express her belief in the value of all human life by offering support and practical help to the families that have special needs. As a single family of faith, the Church cannot and must not neglect the joys or sorrows of any of her members.

2. All of us as Saint Paul says, "continually carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus". That is to say, none of us is exempt from suffering and death, any more than Christ himself was. But Saint Paul goes on to say that we suffer "so that in our bodies the life of Jesus may also be revealed". Here we discover the mystery of redemption. By accepting the Cross with perfect love, Christ has overcome once and for all the power that sin, suffering, weakness and death had over us, and he has given us an abundance of life.

Dear brothers and sisters: the Cross of Christ has the power to transform the life of each and every one of you into a great victory over human weakness. The physical limitations you experience can be transformed by Christ's love into something good and beautiful, and they can make you worthy of the destiny for which you were created. The command that we find elsewhere in Saint Paul, to "glorify God in our bodies", does not apply only to the moral behaviour of those of us who are physically well. Just as Christ glorified the Father by embracing the Cross with perfect love, you too through the power of that same love can glorify God in your bodies by not letting yourselves be overcome by difficulties and pain, and by not giving in to discouragement or any other limitations.

In the depths of your own interior life you can die and rise each day with Christ. And in this way you can yield a harvest of grace and goodness, not only for yourselves and those around you, but also for the Church and for the world. Every time you overcome temptations to discouragement, every time you show a cheerful, generous and patient spirit, you bear witness to that Kingdom – which is yet to come in its fullness – in which we shall be healed of every infirmity and freed from every sorrow.

3. In a great Archdiocese such as Brisbane, there are many Catholic hospitals, homes and services for those in need. Many of them have a long and distinguished history which should be a source of legitimate pride and joy for the Church in this area. They testify to the generosity of the Catholic laity over the years and to the consecrated commitment of so many nursing sisters and brothers. These religious, working together with equally dedicated lay men and women, continue to provide services which extend beyond the Catholic community for the good of all.

It is with special esteem that I greet those who work with the disabled, the handicapped and the sick, not only here in Queensland but throughout all Australia. Prompted by God's grace, you have chosen – either professionally or as volunteers – the life of the Good Samaritan, the life of one who is a neighbour to those in need. In doing so you fulfil an essential Christian mission. And the measure of your success in this mission is the love that you have for those in your care, and your concern not only for their physical needs but also for their thoughts, feelings, and spiritual needs.

4. The touchstone of the spiritual and material service offered in Australia is our belief in the sacredness of every human life. It is a sacredness rooted in the mystery of our creation by God, as well as in the mystery of Redemption of which I have already spoken. In a world where the gift of

human life is often despised, manipulated, abused, and even deliberately aborted or terminated, the Church proclaims without hesitation the sacredness of every human life. No matter what our weaknesses or limitations – whether physical, emotional or spiritual – the life of each one of us is unique; it has its beginning and its end in God's own good time. It is the responsibility of the whole community – from the level of national, state, and local government down to the level of the individual citizen – to protect this sacred gift.

5. The sacredness of life also demands that we try to improve the quality of life. Every reasonable effort must be made to ensure that the disabled and the sick, the aged and the dying, the troubled and the abandoned, have somewhere to turn for help, that they are enabled to live with true dignity. Health care is becoming more sophisticated and costly, and yet we realize ever more clearly that the mere providing of services is not enough. Those being served must also truly participate in the community, and this calls for mutual respect and a willingness to listen. Handicapped and disabled people, in particular, rightly seek to be more fully integrated into the community since they too have an important contribution to make to others. Only by working together can the community hope to find solutions worthy of the respect owed to every single person, and worthy of the long history of love and service shown by people of all faiths in Australia.

In closing, dear brothers and sisters who are handicapped, disabled or ill, I ask for your prayers, which are especially dear to God. Pray for all who suffer in the world. Pray for peace. Pray for the Church even as she prays for you. Remember all who have gone before us in faith: Mary our Mother, who watches over us and the Saints whose lives reveal the power of God shining through human weakness. Remember them and do not be afraid. In the love of our Lord Jesus Christ I impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

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