



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS
BENEDICT XVI
FOR THE SEVENTEENTH WORLD DAY OF THE SICK**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The World Day of the Sick, which will be celebrated next 11 February, the liturgical Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, will see the diocesan communities gathering with their Bishops at prayer meetings in order to reflect and decide on initiatives of sensitization concerning the reality of suffering.

The Pauline Year that we are celebrating is a favourable opportunity to pause and meditate with the Apostle Paul on the fact that “as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too” (2 Cor 1:5).

The spiritual connection with Lourdes also calls to mind the motherly concern of the Mother of Jesus for the brethren of her Son, “who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 62).

This year our attention focuses in particular on children, the weakest and most defenceless creatures, and on those of them who are sick and suffering. There are tiny human beings who bear in their bodies the consequences of incapacitating diseases, and others who are fighting illnesses that are still incurable today, despite the progress of medicine and the assistance of qualified researchers and health-care professionals.

There are children injured in body and in mind, subsequent to conflicts and wars, and other innocent victims of the insensate hatred of adults. There are “street” children, who are deprived of the warmth of a family and left to themselves, and minors defiled by degenerate people who

violate their innocence, causing them psychological damage that will mark them for the rest of their lives.

Then we cannot forget the incalculable number of minors who die of thirst, hunger and the lack of medical help, as well as the small exiles and refugees who flee from their countries together with their parents in search of a better life. A silent cry of pain rises from all these children which questions our consciences as human beings and believers.

The Christian community, which cannot remain indifferent to such tragic situations, feels the impelling duty to intervene. Indeed, as I wrote in the Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, the Church “is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life” (n. 25,b).

I therefore hope that the World Day of the Sick will offer the parish and diocesan communities an opportunity to be ever more aware that they are the “family of God” and will encourage them to make the love of the Lord, who asks that “within the ecclesial family no member should suffer through being in need”, visible in villages, neighbourhoods and cities (*ibid*).

The witness of charity is part of the very life of every Christian community. And from the outset the Church has expressed the Gospel principles in practical gestures, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles.

Today, given the changed conditions of health-care assistance, people are feeling the need for closer collaboration between health-care professionals who work in the various health-care institutions and the ecclesial communities present in the territory. In this perspective the value of an institution linked to the Holy See such as the Bambino Gesù Pediatric Hospital – this year celebrating its 140th anniversary – is confirmed in every way.

But this is not all. Since the sick child belongs to a family that frequently shares in his or her suffering with serious hardship and difficulties, Christian communities cannot but also feel duty-bound to help families afflicted by the illness of a son or daughter.

After the example of the “Good Samaritan”, it is necessary to bend over the people so harshly tried and offer them the support of their concrete solidarity.

In this way the acceptance and sharing of suffering is expressed in the practical support of sick children's families, creating in them an atmosphere of serenity and hope and making them feel that they are in the midst of a larger family of brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus' compassion for the widow of Nain (cf. Lk 7:12-17) and for Jairus' supplication (cf. Lk 8:41-56) constitute, among others, useful reference points for learning to share in the moments of physical and moral suffering of the many sorely tried families.

All this implies disinterested and generous love, a reflection and a sign of the merciful love of God who never abandons his children in trial but always provides them anew with wonderful resources of heart and mind to equip them to face life's difficulties adequately.

The daily devotion and continuous commitment to serving sick children is an eloquent testimony of love for human life, particularly for the life of those who are weak and dependant on others in all things and for all things.

In fact, it is necessary to assert vigorously *the absolute and supreme dignity of every human life*. The teaching that the Church ceaselessly proclaims does not change with the passing of time: human life is beautiful and should be lived to the full, even when it is weak and enveloped in the mystery of suffering.

We must turn our gaze to the Crucified Jesus: in dying on the Cross he wished to share in the suffering of all humanity. We may discern in his suffering for love a supreme sharing in the plight of little ones who are ill and of their parents.

My venerable Predecessor John Paul ii who offered a shining example of patient acceptance of suffering, particularly towards the end of his life, wrote: "On this Cross is the 'Redeemer of man', the Man of Sorrows, who has taken upon himself the physical and moral sufferings of the people of all times, so that in love they may find the salvific meaning of their sorrow and valid answers to all of their questions" (*Salvifici Doloris*, n. 31).

I would like here to express my appreciation and encouragement to the international and national organizations which care for sick children, especially in the poor countries, and which with generosity and abnegation make their contribution to assuring them adequate and loving care.

At the same time, I address a heartfelt appeal to the leaders of nations that they will strengthen the laws and provisions for sick children and their families. For her part, the Church – always, but especially when a child's life is at stake – is prepared to offer cordial collaboration with the intention of transforming the whole human civilization into a "civilization of love" (*Salvifici Doloris*, n. 30).

To conclude, I would like to express my spiritual closeness to all of you, dear brothers and sisters who are suffering from an illness. I address an affectionate greeting to all those who assist you: the Bishops, priests, consecrated people, health-care workers, volunteers and all who devote themselves lovingly to treating and alleviating the sufferings of those who are grappling with illness.

Here is a special greeting for you, dear sick and suffering children: the Pope embraces you with fatherly affection together with your parents and relatives, and assures you of his special

remembrance in prayer, as he asks you to trust in the maternal help of the Immaculate Virgin Mary who last Christmas we once again contemplated joyfully holding in her arms the Son of God who became a Child. As I invoke upon you and upon every sick person the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin, Health of the Sick, I cordially impart to all a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 2 February 2009

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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