



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS***

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 26 November 2011

Your Eminence,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is a cause of great joy to meet you on the occasion of the 26th International Conference organized by the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers and to reflect on the theme: “*Health Pastoral Care, Serving Life in the Light of the Magisterium of Blessed John Paul II*”. I am pleased to greet the bishops responsible for Health Care Apostolate who have gathered at the tomb of the Apostle Peter for the first time to determine ways for collegial action in this very delicate and important area of the Church’s mission. I express my gratitude to the dicastery for its invaluable service, beginning with the President, Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, whom I thank for his cordial words in which he has also described the Conference’s work. I also greet the Secretary and the Undersecretary, both of whom were appointed recently, the officials and the personnel, as well as the speakers and the experts, the heads of Health Care Institutes, the health care workers, everyone present and all those who helped to organize the Conference.

I am sure that your reflections have led to deeper knowledge of “The Gospel of Life”, the precious legacy of the Magisterium of Bl. John Paul II. He founded this Pontifical Council in 1985 to give a concrete witness to it in the vast and complex sphere of health care. Twenty years ago he established the celebration of the World Day of the Sick and, lastly, he set up “Il Buon Samaritano” Foundation to promote a new charitable service for the poorest sick people in various countries and appealed for a renewed commitment to sustaining the Foundation.

In the long and intense years of his pontificate Bl. John Paul II proclaimed that the entire ecclesial community's service to physically or mentally sick people entails constant caring commitment and attention to evangelization, in accordance with Jesus' command to the Twelve to heal the sick (cf. Lk 9:2). In particular, in the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* of 11 February 1984, my Venerable Predecessor affirmed: "Suffering seems to belong to man's transcendence: it is one of those points in which man is in a certain sense 'destined' to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way" (n. 2).

The mystery of pain seems to obscure God's face, almost making him a stranger or even pointing to him as responsible for human suffering, but the eyes of faith can see this mystery in depth. God became incarnate, he made himself close to man, even in the most difficult human situations. He did not eliminate suffering, but in the Crucified and Risen One, in the Son of God, who suffered unto death and death on a cross, he revealed that his love also descends into man's deepest abyss in order to bring him hope.

The Crucified One is Risen; death was illuminated by Easter morning: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). In the Son, who was "given" for the salvation of humanity, in a certain way the truth of love is demonstrated through the truth of suffering and the Church, born from the mystery of Redemption in the Cross of Christ "has to try to meet man in a special way on the path of his suffering. In this meeting man 'becomes the way for the Church', and this way is one of the most important ones" (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, n. 3).

Dear friends, your service of accompanying, of being close to our brethren who are sick, lonely and often tried by wounds that are not only physical but also spiritual and moral, puts you in a privileged position for bearing witness to God's saving action, his love for human beings and for the world, which embraces even the most painful and terrible situations. The face of the Saviour dying on the Cross, of the Son, consubstantial with the Father, who suffers for us as a man (cf. *ibid.*, n. 17) teaches us to protect and nurture life in whatever stage and whatever condition it is found, recognizing the dignity and value of every individual human being, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27) and called to eternal life.

The slow calvary that marked the last years of Bl. John Paul II bore witness to this vision of pain and suffering, illuminated by Christ's death and resurrection. We may apply St Paul's words to it: "I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col 1:24). Firm and certain faith permeated his physical weakness, making his illness, lived for love of God, for the Church and for the world, an actual participation in Christ's journey to Calvary.

The *sequela Christi* did not spare Bl. John Paul II from taking up his own cross every day to the very end, to be like his one Master and Lord who from the Cross became a point of attraction and salvation for humanity (cf. Jn 12:32; 19:37) and manifested his glory (cf. Mk 15:39). In the Homily

of the Holy Mass for the Beatification of my Venerable Predecessor I recalled how “the Lord gradually stripped him of everything, yet he remained ever a ‘rock’, as Christ desired. His profound humility, grounded in close union with Christ, enabled him to continue to lead the Church and to give to the world a message which became all the more eloquent as his physical strength declined” (*Homily*, 1 May 2011).

Dear friends, treasuring Bl. John Paul II’s witness, lived in his own flesh, I hope that you too, in the exercise of your pastoral ministry and in your professional work, may discover in the glorious tree of the Cross of Christ “the fulfilment and the complete revelation of the whole Gospel of life” (Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 50). In your service in the various sectors of the health care Apostolate, may you too experience that “only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me” (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 18).

I entrust each one of you, the sick, families and all health care workers to the motherly protection of Mary, and I willingly and warmly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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