



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO PARTICIPANT IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ORGANIZED BY THE PONTIFICAL  
COUNCIL FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS  
(HEALTH PASTORAL CARE)**

*Paul VI Hall  
Saturday, 17 November 2012*

**[Video]**

*Your Eminences,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I offer you a warm welcome! I thank the President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, (Health Pastoral Care), Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, for his courteous words; I greet the distinguished speakers and all those present. The theme of your Conference — “The Hospital, a Place of Evangelization: a Human and Spiritual Mission” — gives me an opportunity to extend my Greeting to all the health-care workers, and in particular to the members of the Italian Catholic Doctors’ Association and of the European Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, which has examined the subject “Bioethics and Christian Europe” at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Rome. I also greet the sick people present, their relatives, the chaplains and the volunteers, the members of the associations, and in particular of the Italian National Union for the Transport of the Sick to Lourdes and International Shrines (UNITALSI), the students at the Faculties of Medicine and Surgery and those who are taking degree courses in the health-care professions.

The Church always turns with the same brotherly spirit of sharing to all who are suffering, enlivened by the Spirit of the One who, with the power of love has restored meaning and dignity to the mystery of suffering. The Second Vatican Council said to these people “know that you are

not... abandoned or useless” (cf. *Message to the Poor, the Sick and the Suffering, 8 December 1965*).

And in these same tones of hope, the Church also reassures health-care professionals and volunteers. Yours is a special vocation that requires study, sensitivity and experience. Nevertheless, a further skill which goes beyond academic qualifications is demanded of those who choose to work in the world of suffering, living their work as a “human and spiritual mission”. It is “the Christian science of suffering”, explicitly pointed out by the Council as “the only one that can respond to the mystery of suffering” and of bringing to the sick “relief without illusion”. The Council says: “it is not within our power to bring you bodily help nor the lessening of your physical sufferings.... But we have something deeper and more valuable to give you.... Christ did not do away with suffering. He did not even wish to unveil to us entirely the mystery of suffering. He took suffering upon Himself and this is enough to make you understand all its value” (*ibid.*). May you be qualified experts in this “Christian science of suffering”! Your being Catholics, without fear, gives you a greater responsibility in the context of society and of the Church: it is a real vocation, as has recently been witnessed by exemplary figures such as St Giuseppe Moscati, St Riccardo Pampuri, St Gianna Beretta Molla, St Anna Schäffer and the Servant of God Jérôme Lejeune.

This is also a commitment of the New Evangelization in the times of an economic crisis that are cutting funds for health care. In this very context hospitals and structures for assistance must rethink their role to prevent health, first and foremost a universal good to be guaranteed and defended from becoming a mere “product” subjected to the laws of the market, hence accessible to few. The special attention owed to the dignity of the suffering can never be forgotten, applying also in the context of health-care policies the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity (cf. Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 58).

Today, although on the one hand because of the progress in technology and science the ability to heal the sick physically is increasing, on the other, the ability to “care for” the patient, seen in his integrity and uniqueness, appears to be weakening. Thus the ethical horizons of medical science that risks forgetting that its vocation is to serve every person and the whole person, in the various phases of his or her life, seem to be dulled. It is to be hoped that the language of the “Christian science of suffering” — to which belong compassion, solidarity, sharing, self-denial, giving freely, the gift of self — become the universal lexicon of those who work in the sector of health-care assistance.

It is the language of the Good Samaritan of the Gospel parable, which — according to Blessed Pope *John Paul II* — may be considered as “one of the essential elements of moral culture and universally human civilization” (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, n. 29). In this perspective, hospitals assume a privileged position in evangelizing, because wherever the Church is the “bearer of the presence of God” it becomes at the same time “the instrument of the true humanization of man and the world” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on*

*Some Aspects of Evangelization*, n. 9). “Only by being very clear that at the heart of medical and health-care assistance is the well-being of the human person in his frailest and most defenceless state, of man in search of meaning in the face of the unfathomable mystery of suffering, can one conceive of the hospital as “a place in which the relationship of treatment is not a profession but a mission; where the charity of the Good Samaritan is the first seat of learning and the face of suffering man is Christ’s own Face” (*Discourse, Visit to the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Rome, 3 May 2012*).

Dear friends, this healing and evangelizing assistance is the task that always awaits you. Now more than ever our society needs “Good Samaritans” with generous hearts and arms wide open to all, in the awareness that “The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer” (*Spe Salvi*, n. 38). This “going beyond” the clinical approach opens you to the dimension of transcendence, for which the chaplains and religious assistants play a fundamental role. It is their primary task to make the glory of the Crucified Risen One shine out in the rich panorama of health care and in the mystery of suffering.

I would like to reserve a last word for you, dear sick people. Your silent witness is an effective sign and instrument of evangelization for the people who look after you and for your families, in the certainty that “no tear, neither of those who are suffering nor of those who are close to them, is lost before God” (*Angelus, 1 February 2009*). You “are the brothers of the suffering Christ, and with him, if you wish, you are saving the world!” (Second Vatican Council, *Message to the Poor, the Sick and the Suffering, 8 December 1965*).

As I entrust you to the Virgin Mary, *Salus Infirmorum* [Health of the Sick], so that she may guide your footsteps and always make you hardworking and tireless witnesses of the Christian science of suffering, I warmly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.