



The Holy See

PASTORAL JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

VISIT TO SAINT FRANCIS HOSPITAL

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Nsambya (Uganda)
Sunday, 7 February 1993*

Dear Friends,

1. With great affection in the Lord Jesus Christ I am very pleased to *greet representatives* of the sick and disabled of Uganda here at Saint Francis Hospital in Nsambya. My cordial good wishes also go to the doctors, nurses, and medical professionals devoted to their care.

In a few days, on 11 February, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, the universal Church will celebrate the first World Day of the Sick. This celebration has been established in order to manifest the Church's concern for the sick and her commitment to care for their physical and spiritual needs. These are essential aspects of the Church's witness to Christ in all the countries in which she is found.

Here in Uganda, the Church's mission of ministering to the sick is carried out by numerous hospitals and health-care centres, including this hospital, established by Mother Kevin Kearney, foundress of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters for Africa, in 1906. Since then, it has grown steadily and expanded its programmes and services until it is now the largest non-government hospital in the country. The extensive medical, rehabilitative and home-care services provided are impressive, and all is done in that spirit of charity which comes from the example of the Lord Jesus himself, who promised to bless those who serve the least of his brethren (Cf. Mt. 10: 42). In the name of the whole Church, I gladly take this occasion to thank those who, following the example of

the Good Samaritan, bring compassion and help to the sick in their hour of need.

2. *My dear sick and disabled brothers and sisters:* Saint Paul taught us that in a mysterious way our sufferings, when joined to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, take on a saving power for the life of his Church. He wrote to the Colossians: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church" (Col. 1: 24).

"I rejoice!" How difficult it often is for you to rejoice, when pain, illness, the loss of physical strength and the separation from loved ones can lead you to impatience, frustration, loneliness, and even to the verge of despair. *Suffering finds its meaning and fulfilment only in faith and charity:* in the faith that our patient endurance "works for good with those who love God" (Rom. 8: 28), and in that charity which causes us to take up our cross each day (Cf. Lk. 9: 23) in order to follow Christ, who won our salvation by laying down his life for his friends (Cf. Jn. 15: 13; Gal. 2: 20). We have full confidence that we indeed "complete what is lacking in Christ's affliction for the sake of his Body... the Church". Your brothers and sisters in Uganda need you: they need your prayers and your generous self-sacrifice! Your patient endurance can help bring them life and hope, if you embrace the will of God without reserve, trusting that you will be able to do all things in him who gives you strength (Cf. Phil. 4: 13).

The Church, together with all men and women of good will, is deeply distressed at the great number of individuals in Uganda, particularly children and young people, who are suffering from AIDS, and at the untold hardship which this disease has brought to families, communities and the Nation itself. Today I wish to make my own the words of your Bishops, who wrote: "This situation which is affecting everybody in the country needs to be confronted in solidarity, with much love and care for the victims, with much generosity to the orphans and with much commitment to a renewed way of Christian moral living" (Pastoral Letter of the Ugandan Bishops, *Let Your Light Shine*, 28). The sick too have a special role to play in meeting the challenge of AIDS: *you can offer your suffering for the spread of Christ's truth and love throughout this beloved Nation*. I encourage you to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 5: 16).

3. I now entrust to Bishop Henry Ssentongo, President of the Medical Bureau of the Uganda Episcopal Conference, the *written Message I have addressed to all the sick and disabled in Uganda*. In doing so, I offer fervent prayers to God, through the intercession of the patron of this hospital, *Saint Francis*, the Poor Man of Assisi who bore in his body the marks of Christ's Passion, that he will help all the sick of Uganda to offer up their sufferings "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom. 12: 1) for the well-being of the people of this country and the whole world. May the prayers of Mary, Health of the Sick, and of Saint Charles Lwanga and the Uganda Martyrs, sustain you in this resolve. To all of you and your families, and to the doctors, nurses, administrators and staff of Saint Francis Hospital, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

*Baana bange abaagalwa
Mbasaasira obulwadde.
Kristu abagumye
Era abawe omukisa.*

(Dear sons and daughters,
I sympathize with you.
May Christ comfort you,
and may he bless you).