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# **BOLLETTINO**

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## **Audience with the Catholic Association of Healthcare Workers (ACOS) on the 40th anniversary of its founding**

This morning the Pope received in audience the Catholic Association of Healthcare Workers (*Associazione Cattolica Operatori Sanitari*, ACOS) on the 40th anniversary of its founding. In his address, the Holy Father considered the themes of conscientious objection, the ethical challenges posed by new technologies, and the need for the healthcare system to be guided by the person, rather than corporate logic.

The following is the Holy Father's address:

### **Address of the Holy Father**

Dear brothers and sisters,

I greet you all, members of the Catholic Association of Healthcare Workers, in particular your president, whom I thank for his words, and the ecclesiastic consultant. I am pleased to meet with you and to share with you the intention to defend and promote life, starting from those who are most helpless or in need of assistance inasmuch as they are sick, or elderly, or marginalized, or because, facing existence, they ask to be welcomed and cared for. To all of them, in different ways, you provide an indispensable service whenever, as health workers, you offer them the care they need or the closeness that sustains them in their fragility.

The commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of ACOS encourages us to thank the Lord for what you have received from the Association and for what it has enabled you to achieve in this time for the improvement of the health system and the working conditions of all health workers, as well as for the condition of the sick and their families, who are the first to benefit from your commitment.

In the last decades, the healthcare system has transformed radically, and with it also the way of understanding medicine and the very relationship with the patient has changed. Technology has reached sensational and unimagined milestones, and has opened up the way to new techniques for diagnosis and care, however posing

problems of an ethical nature ever more forcefully. Indeed, many consider that any possibility offered by technology to be morally feasible, but in reality, for every medical practice or intervention on the human being, it must first be evaluated with attention whether or not it effectively respects human life and dignity. The practice of conscientious objection, in the extreme cases in which the integrity of human life is endangered, is based therefore on the personal need to not act in a way contrary to one's own ethical convictions, but also represents a sign for the surrounding healthcare environment, as well as in relation to the patients themselves and their families.

The decision to object, however, when necessary, must be taken with respect, so that what should be done with humility does not become a reason for disdain or pride, so as not to generate a similar disdain in those who observe, which would impede comprehension of the true motivations that drive you. It is good instead always to seek dialogue, especially with those who have different positions, listening to their point of view and seeking to transmit your own, not like one who gives a lecture, but as one who seeks the true good of people. To be a travelling companion to those next to us, especially the least, the most forgotten, the excluded: this is the best way to understand fully and with truth the different situations and the moral good that is implicated.

This is also the way to bear the best witness to the Gospel, that sheds on the person the potent light that the Lord Jesus continues to project on every human being. It is precisely Christ's humanity that is the inexhaustible treasury and the greatest school, from which we can continually learn. With His gestures and His words, He made us feel the touch and hear the voice of God and taught us that every individual, especially the last, is not a number, but a person, unique and unrepeatable.

It is precisely the effort to treat the sick as people, and not as numbers, that must be performed in our time and taking into account the form that the healthcare system has progressively assumed. Its corporatization, which has placed in the foreground the needs of the reduction of costs and the rationalization of services, has fundamentally changed the approach to illness and to the patient himself, with a preference for efficiency that not infrequently places in second place attention to the person, who has the need to be understood, listened to and accompanied, just as he or she needs a correct diagnoses and effective cure.

Besides, healing passes not only from the body but also the spirit, the capacity to rediscover trust and to react; for which the sick person cannot be treated like a machine, nor can the healthcare system, either public or private, be conceived of as a production line. People are never the same as one another: they must be understood and cured one by one. This obviously demands notable effort on the part of healthcare workers, which is often not sufficiently understood or appreciated.

The care that you give to the sick, so demanding and engaging, requires that you also take care of yourself. In fact, in an environment where the patient becomes a number, you too risk becoming one too, and being "burned out" by work shifts that are too hard, by the stress of emergencies or by the emotional impact. It is therefore important that healthcare professionals have adequate safeguards in their work, receive proper recognition for the tasks they perform and can use the right tools to be always motivated and trained.

Training is an objective that your Association has always pursued, and I invite you to continue with determination, at a time when we often lose sight of the most basic values of respect and protection of the life of all. The training you propose is not only exchange, study and updating, but also pays special attention to spirituality, so as to rediscover and appreciate this fundamental dimension of the person, often neglected in our time but so important, especially for those who live with illness or are close to those who suffer.

I also encourage you always to value the experience of being an association, facing with new zeal the challenges that await you in the areas we have considered together. A good synergy between regional seats will enable the efforts of individuals and the various local groups not to remain isolated but to be coordinated and to multiply.

To keep alive your spirit always, I urge you to be faithful to prayer and to nourish yourselves with the Word of God. May you be inspired by the example of constancy and dedication of the saints: among them, they have

served the sick selflessly and with love, especially the most abandoned.

Dear friends, I accompany you with my prayer in your valuable task of bearing witness. I entrust you to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to which your Association is consecrated. May the Association, which has in such a clear way practised hospitality and charity, remain always for us a refuge in hardships and a model of service to our brothers. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

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