



POPE BENEDICT XVI

MESSAGE FOR WORLD DAY OF THE SICK 2011

'By his wounds you have been healed' (1 Pt 2:24)

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

Every year, on the day of the memorial of the Blessed Virgin of Lourdes, which is celebrated on 11 February, the Church proposes the World Day of the Sick. This event, as the venerable John Paul II wanted, becomes a propitious occasion to reflect upon the mystery of suffering and above all to make our communities and civil society more sensitive to our sick brothers and sisters. If every man is our brother, much more must the sick, the suffering and those in need of care be, at the centre of our attention, so that none of them feels forgotten or emarginated; indeed, 'the true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through "com-passion" is a cruel and inhuman society' (Encyclical letter *Spe salvi*, n. 38). The initiatives that will be organised in each diocese on the occasion of this Day should be a stimulus to make care for the suffering increasingly effective, also in view of the solemn celebration that will take place in 2013 at the Marian sanctuary of Altötting in Germany.

1. I still have in my heart the moment when, during the course of the pastoral visit to Turin, I was able to pause in reflection and prayer before the Holy Shroud, before that suffering face, which invites us to reflect on He who took upon himself the passion of man, of every time and place, even our sufferings, our difficulties, our sins. How many faithful, during the course of history, have passed in front of that burial cloth, which enveloped the body of a crucified man, and which completely corresponds to what the Gospels hand down to us about the passion and death of Jesus! To contemplate it is an invitation to reflect upon what St. Peter writes: 'By his wounds you have been healed' (1 Pt 2:24). The Son of God suffered, died, but rose again, and precisely because of this those wounds become the sign of our redemption, of forgiveness and reconciliation with the Father; however they also become a test for the faith of the disciples and our faith: every time that the Lord speaks about his passion and death, they do not understand, they reject it, they oppose it. For them, as for us, suffering is always charged with mystery, difficult to accept and to bear. The two disciples of Emmaus walk sadly because of the events that had taken place in those days in Jerusalem, and only when the Risen One walks along the road with them do they open up to a new vision (cf. Lk 24:13-31). Even the apostle Thomas manifests the difficulty of believing in the way of redemptive passion: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (Jn 20:25). But before Christ who shows his wounds, his response is transformed into a moving profession of faith: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn 20:28). What was at first an insurmountable obstacle, because it was a sign of Jesus' apparent failure, becomes, in the encounter with the Risen One, proof of a victorious love: 'Only a God who loves us to the extent of taking upon himself our wounds and our pain, especially innocent suffering, is worthy of faith.' (Urbi et Orbi Message, Easter 2007).

2. Dear sick and suffering, it is precisely through the wounds of Christ that we are able to see, with eyes of hope, all the evils that afflict humanity. In rising again, the Lord did not remove suffering and evil from the

world, but he defeated them at their root. He opposed the arrogance of Evil with the omnipotence of his Love. He has shown us, therefore, that the way of peace and joy is Love: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34). Christ, victor over death, is alive in our midst. And while with St. Thomas we also say “My Lord and my God!”, let us follow our Master in readiness to spend our lives for our brothers and sisters (cf. 1 Jn 3:16), becoming messengers of a joy that does not fear pain, the joy of the Resurrection. St. Bernard observed: ‘God cannot suffer but He can suffer with’. God, who is Truth and Love in person, wanted to suffer for us and with us; He became man so that He could suffer with man, in a real way, in flesh and blood. To every human suffering, therefore, there has entered One who shares suffering and endurance; in all suffering con-solatio is diffused, the consolation of God’s participating love so as to make the star of hope rise (cf. Encyclical letter *Spe salvi*, n. 39).

I repeat this message to you, dear brothers and sisters, so that you may be witnesses to it through your suffering, your lives and your faith.

3. Looking forward to the appointment of Madrid, in August 2011, for the World Youth Day, I would also like to address a special thought to young people, especially those who live the experience of illness. Often the Passion, the Cross of Jesus, generate fear because they seem to be the negation of life. In reality, it is exactly the contrary! The Cross is God’s ‘yes’ to mankind, the highest and most intense expression of his love and the source from which flows eternal life. From the pierced heart of Jesus this divine life flowed. He alone is capable of liberating the world from evil and making his Kingdom of justice, peace and love, to which we all aspire, grow (cf. Message for the World Youth Day 2011, n. 3). Dear young people, learn to ‘see’ and to ‘meet’ Jesus in the Eucharist, where he is present in a real way for us, to the point of making himself food for our journey, but know how to recognise and serve him also in the poor, in the sick, in our brothers and sisters who are suffering and in difficulty, who need your help (cf. *ibid.*, n. 4). To all you young people, both sick and healthy, I repeat my invitation to create bridges of love and solidarity so that nobody feels alone but near to God and part of the great family of his children (cf. General Audience, 15 November 2006).

4. When contemplating the wounds of Jesus our gaze turns to his most sacred Heart, in which God’s love manifests itself in a supreme way. The Sacred Heart is Christ crucified, with the side opened by the lance from which flowed blood and water (cf. Jn 19:34), ‘symbol of the sacraments of the Church, so that all men, drawn to the Heart of the Saviour, might drink with joy from the perennial fountain of salvation’ (Roman Missal, Preface for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). Especially you, dear sick people, feel the nearness of this Heart full of love and draw with faith and joy from this source, praying: ‘Water of the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. O good Jesus, hear my prayers. In your wounds, hide me’ (Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola).

5. At the end of this Message of mine for the next World Day of the Sick, I would like to express my affection to each and everyone, feeling myself a participant in the sufferings and hopes that you live every day in union with the crucified and risen Christ, so that he gives you peace and healing of heart. Together with him may the Virgin Mary, whom we invoke with trust as Health of the Sick and Consoler of the Suffering, keep watch at your side! At the foot of the Cross the prophecy of Simon was fulfilled for her: her heart as a Mother was pierced (cf. Lk 2:35). From the depths of her pain, a participation in that of her Son, Mary is made capable of accepting the new mission: to become the Mother of Christ in his members. At the hour of the Cross, Jesus presents to her each of his disciples, saying: “Behold your son” (cf. Jn 19:26–27). Her maternal compassion for the Son becomes maternal compassion for each one of us in our daily sufferings (cf. Homily at Lourdes, 15 September 2008).

Dear brothers and sisters, on this World Day of the Sick, I also invite the authorities to invest more and more in health-care structures that provide help and support to the suffering, above all the poorest and most in need, and addressing my thoughts to all dioceses I send an affectionate greeting to bishops, priests, consecrated people, seminarians, health-care workers, volunteers and all those who dedicate themselves with love to treating and relieving the wounds of every sick brother and sister in hospitals or nursing homes and in families: in the faces of the sick you should know how to see always the Face of faces: that of Christ. I assure you all that I will remember you in my prayers, as I bestow upon you my Apostolic Blessing.

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