



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

TO PILGRIMS, UNITALSI VOLUNTEERS AND THE SICK *Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes*

13th World Day of the Sick

Friday, 11 February 2005 Dear Brothers and Sisters,¹ I joyfully join all of you who are taking part in the annual meeting of pilgrims, the sick and volunteers, organized jointly by UNITALSI and the Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi. I extend a most affectionate greeting to each one of you. In the first place, I greet the Cardinal Vicar, the Bishops and the many priests present, and I extend my greeting with deep sympathy to you, dear pilgrims who have come here to relive Lourdes' special atmosphere; to you, dear directors of UNITALSI and of the *Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi*; to you, dear volunteers; and especially to you, dear sick people, to whom I feel particularly close.

2. The evocative Eucharistic and Marian Celebration in which you are taking part in St Peter's acquires special significance on the day in which the liturgy commemorates Our Lady of Lourdes.

The anniversary of 11 February reminds us of the Grotto of Massabielle, high up in the French Pyrenees, where in 1858 Our Lady appeared at least 18 times to St Bernadette Soubirous. From that Grotto, which has become a place of prayer and hope for multitudes of pilgrims from every part of the world, Our Lady continues to ask for prayer, penance and conversion. Her message is the same as that of Christ: "*Repent, and believe in the Gospel*" (Mk 1: 15), which is offered to us by the liturgy of Lent that has just begun. Let us accept it with humble and docile compliance! The flow of sick and suffering people to the feet of the Blessed Virgin is a ceaseless exhortation to entrust ourselves to Christ and his heavenly Mother, who never abandon those who turn to them in moments of suffering and trial.

3. In dying on the Cross, Christ, the Man of sorrows, brought the Father's plan of love to fulfilment and redeemed the world. Dear sick people, if you join your suffering to the suffering of Christ, you will be his privileged cooperators in the salvation of souls. This is your task in the Church, which is always deeply aware of the role and value of illness enlightened by faith. Thus, your suffering, dear sick people, is never wasted! Indeed, it is valuable for it is a mysterious but real sharing in the saving mission of the Son of God. The Pope, therefore, sets great store by the value of your prayers and suffering: offer them up for the Church and for the world; offer them for me, too, and for my mission as universal Pastor of the Christian people.⁴ From St Peter's Basilica, our gaze now broadens to take in so many other localities where Christian communities are gathered today on the occasion of the 13th World Day of the Sick and, especially at "Mary Queen of the Apostles" Shrine in Yaoundé, Cameroon. It is there that the principal celebrations of this important ecclesial event on the theme: "Christ, hope for Africa" are being held. The African Continent, together with all humanity, is crying out to experience the merciful love of the Lord and the support of the Holy Virgin, especially in moments of exhaustion and illness.

May Mary, Woman of sorrow and of hope, be gentle to all who are suffering and obtain fullness of life for each one: may she clasp them all to her maternal heart. Most Holy Virgin, Queen of Africa and of the whole world, pray for us! I impart my Blessing to everyone with affection.

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