



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE III WORLD DAY OF THE SICK**

1. Jesus' gestures of salvation towards "all those who were the prisoners of evil" (*Roman Missal*, Com. Pref. VII) have always been significantly perpetuated in the Church's concern for the sick. She manifests her attention to those suffering in many ways, among which the establishment of the *World Day of the Sick* is of great importance in the present circumstances. This initiative, which has met with broad acceptance among those who take to heart the conditions of the suffering, seeks to give a new impetus to the Christian community's pastoral and charitable action in such a way as to ensure that this presence will be increasingly effective and incisive in society.

This need is especially felt in our time, which sees whole populations tried by enormous hardships as a result of bloody conflicts whose highest price is often paid by the weak. How can we fail to acknowledge that our civilization should "realize that, from various points of view, it is a *society which is sick* and is creating profound distortions in man" (*Letter to Families*, n. 20)?

It is *sick* because of its raging egoism, because of the individualistic utilitarianism often proposed as a model for life, because of the negation of indifference which is quite often displayed in regard to man's transcendent destiny, because of the crisis in moral and spiritual values, which so deeply troubles mankind. The "pathology" of the spirit is no less dangerous than physical "pathology", and they influence each other.

2. In my Message for last year's World Day of the Sick I wanted to recall the 10th anniversary of the publication of the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*, which deals with the Christian meaning of human suffering. On this occasion I would like to call attention to the approaching 10th anniversary of another highly significant ecclesial event involving the pastoral care of the sick. With the *Motu Proprio Dolentium hominum* of 11 February 1985, I instituted the Pontifical Commission — which later became the Pontifical Council — for Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers, which, through multiple initiatives, "manifests the Church's concern for the ill by helping those engaged in

serving the sick and the suffering so that the apostolate of mercy to which they are devoted will meet the new demands with increasing effectiveness" (Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 152).

The leading event associated with the next World Day of the Sick, which we shall celebrate on 11 February 1995, will take place on African soil, at the Yamoussoukro Shrine of Mary, Queen of Peace, in Côte d'Ivoire. It will be an ecclesial gathering spiritually linked to the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops; at the same time, it will be an occasion for sharing in the joy of the Côte d'Ivoire Church, which is marking the centennial of the arrival of the first missionaries.

Coming together for an anniversary which is charged with such emotion on the African continent, and particularly at the Marian Shrine of Yamoussoukro, invites us to reflect on the *relationship between pain and peace*. This is a very profound relationship: when there is no peace, suffering spreads and death expands its power among men. In the social, as well as in the familial community, the decline of peaceful understanding translates into a proliferation of attacks on life, whereas serving, advancing and defending life, even at the cost of personal sacrifice, constitute the indispensable premise for authentically building individual and social peace.

3. On the threshold of the third millennium, peace is, unfortunately, still distant, and there are abundant signs of a possible further retreat. The identification of the causes and the search for solutions quite often appear laborious. Even among Christians bloody fratricidal struggles are sometimes seen to take place. But those who set about listening to the Gospel in an open spirit cannot grow weary of recalling for themselves and others the necessity of forgiveness and reconciliation. They are called to the altar of daily, ardent prayer, together with the sick all over the world, to present the offering of suffering which Christ has accepted as a means to redeem mankind and save it.

The source of peace is the Cross of Christ, in which we are all saved. Called to union with Christ (cf. Col 1:24) and to suffer like Christ (cf. Lk 9:23; 21:12-19; Jn 15:18-21), the Christian, with the acceptance and the offering of suffering, announces the constructive power of the Cross. Indeed, if war and division are the fruit of violence and sin, peace is the fruit of justice and love, whose summit is the generous offering of one's own suffering, spurred — if necessary — to the point of giving one's life in union with Christ. "The more a person is threatened by sin, the heavier the structure of sin which today's world brings with it, the greater is the eloquence which human suffering possesses in itself. And the more the Church feels the need to have recourse to the value of human sufferings for the salvation of the world" (Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*, n. 27).

4. To use suffering to advantage and offer it for the salvation of the world are, indeed, themselves an action and mission of peace, for from the courageous witness of the weak, the sick, and the suffering the loftiest contribution to peace can flow forth. Suffering, in fact, stimulates deeper spiritual communion, fostering the recovery of a better quality of life, on the one hand, and

promoting a convinced commitment to peace among men, on the other.

Believers know that, in associating themselves with the sufferings of Christ, they become authentic workers of peace. This is an unfathomable mystery, whose fruits are, nevertheless, plainly detectable in the history of the Church and particularly in the lives of the saints. If there is a suffering which provokes death, there is also, however, according to God's plan, a suffering leading to conversion and the transformation of man's heart (cf. 2 Cor 7:10): it is the suffering which, as a completion in one's own flesh of "what is lacking" to Christ's passion (cf. Col 1:24), becomes a reason for and source of joy, for it generates life and peace.

5. Dear brothers and sisters who suffer in body and in spirit, it is my wish that all of you will be able to recognize and accept *God's call for you to be workers of peace through the offering of your pain*. It is not easy to respond to such a demanding call. Always look trustingly towards Jesus, the "Suffering Servant", asking him for the strength to transform the trial afflicting you into a gift. Listen with faith to his voice repeating to each of you: "Come to me, all who are weary and oppressed, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Sorrows and Queen of Peace, obtain for every believer the gift of steadfast faith, which the world greatly needs. Thanks to it, indeed, the forces of evil, hatred and discord will be disarmed by the sacrifice of the weak and the infirm, joined to the paschal mystery of Christ the Redeemer.

6. I now address you, doctors, nurses, members of associations and volunteer groups that serve the sick. Your work will be an authentic witness and concrete action for peace if you are willing to offer true love to those with whom you come into contact and if, as believers, you are able to honour in them the presence of Christ himself. This invitation is addressed in a very special way to the priests and men and women religious who, through the charism of their institutes or particular form of apostolate, are directly engaged in pastoral care in health.

While expressing my deep appreciation for all you do with abnegation and generous dedication, I hope that everyone taking up the medical and paramedical professions will do so with enthusiasm and unselfish goodwill, and I ask the Lord of the harvest to send numerous and holy workers to labour in the vast field of health, which is so important for announcing and witnessing to the Gospel.

May Mary, the Mother of the suffering, be at the side of those undergoing trials and sustain the efforts of those who devote their lives to serving the sick.

With these sentiments, I wholeheartedly bestow a special Apostolic Blessing upon you, dear people who are ill, and upon all who, in whatever manner, are close to you in your manifold material and spiritual needs.

From the Vatican, 21 November 1994, the seventeenth year of my Pontificate.

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