



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN AUSTRALIA

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SICK AT THE «MERCY MATERNITY HOSPITAL»**

Melbourne (Australia), 28 November 1986

*Dear Friends,*1. I greet you in the love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I am delighted to have this opportunity to come to the Mercy Maternity Hospital, to meet the sick and those engaged in health care. In you I embrace all the sick and their helpers in every part of Australia. As a priest and a bishop, and now as Pope, I have always felt a special closeness to the sick. In Rome I try to be with the sick as often as possible. On my journeys to the local Churches throughout the world I look forward to the moment of meeting the sick and those who care for them; it is a very special moment. Today in the name of Christ and the Church, I greet the patients and I thank and encourage all those who work for them. May God be with you in all you do.2. I have learned of the work of the Sisters of Mercy, begun in Ireland in 1831 by Catherine McAuley and carried on with great success in this country. You are a group of talented women committed to following Christ in the religious life, in the care of the sick, and in all the other spheres of your service, and I pray for the continued success of your Institute. Nor can I forget that there are many other congregations of sisters and brothers working for the sick and the needy all over Australia. Catholic hospitals are in fact an important and very obvious element of the life of the Church in this country. If I cannot mention you all by name, be assured nevertheless that I hold you all in my heart. You have my deep gratitude and my prayerful support. You, dear religious sisters and brothers, are dedicated to bringing hope and healing, in the name of Christ, to the sick and the poor, the aged and the uneducated; in fact to any of the suffering members of society, regardless of race, creed or social position. Through you the Church carries on the healing work of Christ. I pray that many young men and women will join your ranks and maintain undiminished in generations to come the charism of service to the sick. Your special place is in the Heart of Jesus and in the heart of the Church.3. We all recognize that the patients are the most important people in any hospital. Therefore I speak especially to them and to all the sick and infirm in Australia. Those who are ill know from experience that illness is one of the basic problems of human existence. Sometimes it strikes us when we least expect it. and when in human terms we least deserve it. When Jesus travelled from place to place during his earthly life, the sick flocked to him. In him they recognised a friend who understood them. They sensed that their suffering spoke deeply to his compassionate and Loving heart. It was a constant appeal to his redeeming love. Jesus certainly cured the bodies of many sick people, but more importantly he cured souls too. He purified their hearts, and turned their whole personalities from self-absorption towards God and other people.4. Dear patients I hope that medical care will be able to restore you to physical health. But I hope and pray

too that your time of sickness, in spite of its burdens, and with the help you receive, will bring you a profound peace of soul. For the person of faith, the path of suffering leads straight to Christ's redemptive Passion, Death and Resurrection: to the Paschal Mystery. Pain is not only an enigma and a trial. For some people it is a mysterious vocation which they live in close union with the sufferings of Jesus. The acceptance of pain in this way takes on an extraordinary spiritual fruitfulness. Saint Paul explained that he was prepared to endure much for his people, and in fact rejoiced in this, because "through my sufferings in the flesh I complete what is still lacking for his body, which is the Church". As Pastor of the Church I am close to you in your sufferings. Especially if your illness is chronic, or even incurable, I urge you to think about the deep and hidden value of your pain and helplessness. You must freely unite your sufferings to the Cross of Jesus Christ, and be one with him in his redemptive mission. Out of that union will come a new understanding, a new hope and peace. Dear sick people you are my special friends. I entrust you to Jesus and to Mary. And I ask you to pray for me, and to offer your sufferings for the salvation of souls and the peace of the world.⁵ Jesus tells us that those who care for the sick are caring for him. Dear members of the medical and administrative staff here and in similar centres: your work is a privileged form of human solidarity and Christian witness. Your service is based on reverence for life, for all human life from the moment of conception until the moment of death. Through your expert and loving care of every patient, through your use and development of the best techniques available, through your research and education programmes, you bear witness to the special dignity of the sick. Here in Mercy Maternity Hospital it is especially fitting to speak about the care of newborn life and to emphasize the special place children must have in any civilized community. Your work strengthens the family and supports mothers in a society where mothers and children are not always given the respect they deserve. May God bless you in this work.⁶ Work in hospitals today is more difficult and complex than ever before. The spectacular advances in medical science and technology, a more complicated industrial and administrative situation, financial constraints, and a more demanding public – all of these call for an ever-increasing level of competence and dedication. Medical science has brought untold benefits to mankind. For this we must be supremely grateful. We see the cures you effect and the good you bring as signs of God's love continuing among us. But medical science is a servant science, not an end in itself. It is meant to serve the total well-being of everyone. It is the work of people in the service of other people. Its methods and aims must always be judged in terms of human values of human rights and responsibilities. Like all powerful forces it can become destructive when used for wrong purposes. To speak of the autonomy of medical science as if it were independent of moral and ethical considerations is to unleash a force that cannot but cause grievous harm to man himself. Catholic medical spokesmen must continue to emphasize that doctors and scientists are human beings, subject to the same moral law as other people, especially when dealing with human patients, human embryos or human tissue. You bring to your work a spirit of faith. This in no way hinders your collaboration with those who – perhaps with a different religious outlook, or with no certain opinion on religious questions – recognize the dignity and excellence of the human person as the criterion of their activity. In the delicate field of medicine and biotechnology the Catholic Church is in no way opposed to progress. Rather, she rejoices at every victory over sickness and disability. Her concern is that nothing should be done which is against life in the reality of a concrete individual existence, no matter how weak or defenceless, no matter how undeveloped or how advanced. The Church therefore never ceases to proclaim the sacredness of all human life, a sacredness which no one has a right to subordinate to any other purpose, no matter how apparently lofty or beneficial. I appeal to all of you in the world of medicine and health care to approach your science and your art with a respect and love for life as the first and sublime condition of all human rights and values.⁷ May Almighty God grant his blessings of strength and courage to you all: to those of you who are sick, for the Lord sees into your hearts and knows your needs; to those of you who serve the sick, for the Lord's words are addressed to you: "I was sick and you came to me". *The peace of Christ be with you today and*

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