



The Holy See

10th WORLD DAY OF THE SICK

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Monday, 11 February 2002

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I address a heartfelt welcome to all of you gathered here, in St Peter's Basilica, at this now traditional date that brings together many pilgrims of the Roman Organization "Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi" and UNITALSI, and makes us relive the intense spiritual atmosphere of Lourdes. Every year we dedicate 11 February to prayer for the sick, for their physical and spiritual healing. I greet Cardinal Ruini, Vicar of Rome, who presided at the Eucharistic concelebration and the bishops and priests who are with him. I greet the directors of UNITALSI and of the "Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi", that promoted and organized this moving event. I greet you especially, dear sick people present here, and those wanting to be here who have been prevented from joining us this evening. I greet you, health-care and volunteer workers, priests, religious and lay people who carry out an unselfish service in this most important field that is the health-care apostolate.

We meet with joy today, when the Church is celebrating the Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes. Associated with this feast for ten years is the celebration of the *World Day of the Sick*, whose "heart" this year is in the Shrine of "Our Lady of Good Health" in Vailankanny, India, known as "the Lourdes of the East". I send a cordial greeting to all those who are assembled there with my Envoy, Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care.

2. The theme of the Tenth World Day of the Sick is taken from Jesus' words: "*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*" (Jn 10,10). They are an invitation to adopt a clear pro-life stance and a sincere dedication to the defence of life from its conception to its natural end. Human

life is a gift of God and should be lived as such, even in the most critical situations. In this regard, how effective is the witness of many persons, some of whom are present this evening, who despite being nailed to their beds by illness for years, are full of serenity because they know how precious their contribution of suffering and prayer is for the Church. I pray to God that today's celebration may be an occasion that brings every sick person extraordinary physical and spiritual relief, and I ask the Lord that it may offer to all, those who are well and those who are sick, the chance to understand much more the saving value of suffering.

3. It is right to fight sickness because health is a gift of God. At the same time, it is also important to be able to interpret God's plan when suffering knocks at our door. For us believers, the key to the interpretation of this mystery is the Cross of Christ. The Incarnate Word himself met our weakness by taking it fully upon himself on Golgotha. Since that moment, suffering has acquired a meaning that makes it extremely valuable. Since that day, pain, in all its manifestations, has acquired a new and special meaning because it becomes participation in the saving work of the Redeemer (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1521). Only if they are united to his sufferings, do our own acquire full meaning and value. By the light of faith, they become sources of hope and salvation.

4. *World Day of the Sick* reminds us then, that beside every suffering person there must be a brother or sister motivated by charity. Like the *Good Samaritan*, of which Jesus speaks in the well-known Gospel parable, every believer is called to offer love to all who are suffering. Never "pass by"! On the contrary, he should stop to bend over the person who is crushed, suffering, and alleviate his burden and difficulties. This is how the Gospel of consolation and charity is proclaimed; this is the witness that the people of our time expect from all Christians.

In this regard, I am pleased with the "Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi" and UNITALSI for promoting an important pilgrimage to the Holy Land for "the physically challenged" and "peacemakers", to the places that witnessed the human events of the Redeemer and are now unfortunately disturbed by so much violence and bathed in blood. The pilgrimage that will bring Italian disabled people to meet the disabled of Jerusalem and Bethlehem is an eloquent act of solidarity among people with handicaps, and at the same time, a message of hope for all.

I deeply hope that this beautiful initiative in the Holy Land, marred by so much hatred and war, may contribute to making sure solidarity and peace prevail. May the Immaculate Virgin, who, at Lourdes came to bring comfort to humanity, continue to watch lovingly over those who are wounded in body and spirit and intercede for all who care for them. May she obtain for the Holy Land, and for every other region of the world, the gift of harmony and peace.

With these sentiments, I gladly join you now, in the traditional candlelight procession that reminds us of Lourdes, and to all I impart a special Apostolic Blessing.

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