



POPE FRANCIS

22nd World Day of the Sick

Faith and Charity: "We Ought to Lay Down Our Lives for One Another"

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES, 11 FEBRUARY 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On the occasion of the Twenty-second World Day of the Sick, whose theme this year is Faith and Charity: "We Ought to Lay Down Our Lives for One Another" (1 Jn 3:16), I turn in a special way to the sick and all those who provide them with assistance and care. The Church recognizes in you, the sick, a special presence of the suffering Christ. It is true. At the side of – and indeed within – our suffering, is the suffering of Christ; he bears its burden with us and he reveals its meaning. When the Son of God mounted the cross, he destroyed the solitude of suffering and illuminated its darkness. We thus find ourselves before the mystery of God's love for us, which gives us hope and courage: hope, because in the plan of God's love even the night of pain yields to the light of Easter, and courage, which enables us to confront every hardship in his company, in union with him.

The incarnate Son of God did not remove illness and suffering from human experience but by taking them upon himself he transformed them and gave them new meaning. New meaning because they no longer have the last word which, instead, is new and abundant life; transformed them, because in union with Christ they need no longer be negative but positive. Jesus is the way, and with his Spirit we can follow him. Just as the Father gave us the Son out of love, and the Son gave himself to us out of the same love, so we too can love others as God has loved us, giving our lives for one another. Faith in God becomes goodness, faith in the crucified Christ becomes the strength to love to the end, even our enemies. The proof of authentic faith in Christ is self-giving and the spreading of love for our neighbours, especially for those who do not merit it, for the suffering and for the marginalized.

By virtue of Baptism and Confirmation we are called to conform ourselves to Christ, who is the Good Samaritan for all who suffer. "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 Jn 3:16). When we draw near with tender love to those in need of care, we bring hope and God's smile to the contradictions of the world. When generous devotion to others becomes the hallmark of our actions, we give way to the Heart of Christ and bask in its warmth, and thus contribute to the coming of God's Kingdom.

To grow in tender love, and a respectful and sensitive charity, we have a sure Christian model to contemplate: Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, who is always attentive to the voice of God and the needs and troubles of her children. Mary, impelled by God's mercy which took flesh within her, selflessly hastened from Galilee to Judea to find and help her kinswoman Elizabeth. She interceded with her Son at the wedding feast of Cana when she saw that there was a shortage of wine. She bore in her heart, throughout the pilgrimage of her life, the words of the elderly Simeon who foretold that a sword would pierce her soul, and with persevering strength she stood at the foot of the cross of Jesus. She knows the way, and for this reason she is the Mother of all of the sick and suffering. To her we can turn with confidence and filial devotion, certain that she will help us, support us and not abandon us. She is the Mother of the crucified and risen Christ: she stands beside our crosses and she accompanies us on the journey towards the resurrection and the fullness of life.

Saint John, the disciple who stood with Mary beneath the cross, brings us to the sources of faith and charity, to the heart of the God who “is love” (1 Jn 4:8,16). He reminds us that we cannot love God if we do not love our brothers and sisters. Those who stand with Mary beneath the cross learn to love as Jesus does. The cross is “the certainty of the faithful love which God has for us. A love so great that it enters into our sin and forgives it, enters into our suffering and gives us the strength to bear it. It is a love which enters into death to conquer it and to save us... the cross of Christ invites us also to allow ourselves to be smitten by his love, teaching us always to look upon others with mercy and tenderness, especially those who suffer, who are in need of help” (Way of the Cross with Young People, Rio de Janeiro, 26 July 2013).

I entrust this Twenty-second World Day of the Sick to the intercession of Mary. I ask her to help the sick to bear their sufferings in fellowship with Jesus Christ and to support all those who care for them. To all the ill, and to all the health-care workers and volunteers who assist them, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 6 December 2013

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