



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 11 February 2004*

***Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes***

***12th World Day of the Sick***

1. Today our thoughts turn to the famous Marian Shrine of Lourdes located in the Pyrenees Mountains that continues to attract great crowds of pilgrims from all over the world, including numerous sick people. This year Lourdes is the venue for the main events of the *World Day of the Sick*, where the coincidence with the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes is now an established tradition.

The Shrine was chosen not only because of its strong connection with the world of sickness and with the pastoral approach of health-care workers. Lourdes was thought of above all because 2004 is the 150th anniversary of the proclamation, on 8 December 1854, of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception. In Lourdes in 1858, four years later, the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in the Grotto of Massabielle, presenting herself as the "Immaculate Conception".

2. Let us now make a spiritual pilgrimage to the feet of the Immaculate Virgin of Lourdes, to take part in the prayers of the clergy and faithful and especially of the sick people gathered there. The World Day of the Sick is a forceful appeal to rediscover the important presence of suffering persons in the Christian community and to appreciate ever deeper their precious contribution. From a merely human standpoint, pain and sickness can appear absurd realities: but when we let the light of the Gospel shine on them we succeed in understanding their deep salvific meaning.

"From the paradox of the Cross", I stressed in my [Message for today's World Day of the Sick](#),

"springs the answer to our most worrying questions. *Christ suffers for us*. He takes upon himself the sufferings of everyone and redeems them. *Christ suffers with us*, enabling us to share our pain with him. United to the suffering of Christ, human suffering becomes a means of salvation" (n. 4).

3. I now address all who feel burdened by suffering in body and spirit. Once again, I express my affection and spiritual closeness to each one. At the same time, I would like to remind you that human life is always a gift from God, even when it is marked by physical suffering of any kind; it is a "gift" to be made the most of for the Church and for the world.

Naturally, those who are suffering should never be left alone. In this regard, I eagerly address a word of heartfelt appreciation to the people who, with simplicity and a spirit of service, take their place beside the sick, seeking to alleviate their sufferings and as far as possible cure them of their ailments, thanks to the progress of the art of medicine. I am thinking especially of health-care workers, doctors, nurses, scientists and researchers, as well as of hospital chaplains and volunteer workers. Caring for a suffering person is a great act of love!

4. "*Sub tuum praesidium...*", as we prayed at the beginning of our meeting. "Under your protection we seek refuge", Immaculate Virgin of Lourdes, who present yourself to us as the perfect model of creation according to God's original plan. To you we entrust the sick, the elderly, the lonely: soothe their pain, dry their tears and obtain for each one the strength they need to do God's will.

May you support those who toil every day to alleviate the sufferings of their brethren! And help us all to grow in the knowledge of Christ, who by his death and Resurrection defeated the powers of evil and death.

Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us!

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*To the English-speaking visitors*

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking pilgrims present at this Audience, especially those from Ireland, Denmark and the United States of America. Upon you and your loved ones, I invoke the Lord's blessings of health and joy.

*To mark the 75th anniversary of the "Lateran Pacts"*

Today is the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty and the Concordat between the Holy See and the Italian State. The "Lateran Pacts" marked a positive turning point of historical importance in relations between the Church and the State in Italy, paving the way to fruitful collaboration for the service and benefit of the entire population.

*To the Italian-speaking pilgrims and visitors*

I cordially welcome the Italian-speaking pilgrims. In particular, I greet the Religious of the Hospitaller Order of St John of God, who by perpetual profession will consecrate their lives to Christ and to the Church. I then greet the scholars from the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone who are taking a course in Church history. I also greet the representatives of the Italian National Council of Industrial Experts who are meeting on the occasion of their association's 75th anniversary.

*To young people, the sick and the newly-weds*

Lastly, I greet you, dear *young people*, dear *sick people* and dear *newly-weds*. May the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Lourdes, protect you always. Call on her confidently and in her you will find comfort and hope.