



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF THE ITALIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE
ON THE ITALIAN CHURCH
IN THE WORLD OF HEALTH**

Saturday 12 May 2001

1. I am delighted to welcome all of you, who in these days are reflecting on the presence of the Church in the world of health, sickness and suffering. I first greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini, President of the Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI), Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, and I thank them for their kind words. I greet the other Bishops present, especially Archbishop Alessandro Plotti of Pisa, Vice-President of the CEI, and Bishop Benito Cocchi of Modena, President of the Episcopal Commission of the CEI for the service of charity and pastoral care for health.

I further extend my greeting to all the sick and suffering, to their families and to all who care for them. Truly, as I wrote in the Message this year for the World Day of the Sick, I wish to visit in spirit every day all who suffer, to "pause beside the patients, their relatives and the health-care personnel" (n. 3).

This convention of yours, significant for many reasons, fits into the journey undertaken by the Italian Church for an ever more active promotion of health pastoral care. I encourage you to continue on this path, so that pastoral activity in the field of health care will be known for its powerful evangelical witness, in full fidelity to Christ's mandate: "Preach as you go saying 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand'. Heal the sick" (cf. Lk 5,1-2; Mt 10,7-9; Mk 3,13-19).

2. You have come together to study the purpose and the ways in which to carry out Christ's mandate today. From an attentive discernment of the current social and cultural reality, you will certainly find concrete indications about how the Church must be present in the field of health

care, to better its quality and define new ways for apostolic participation.

In this regard it is useful to recall, as I wrote in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* that: "It is not a matter of inventing a new programme. The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself" (n. 29).

In the Message for the Eighth World Day of the Sick during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 I observed: "Jesus did not only treat and heal the sick, but he was also a tireless *promoter of health* through his saving presence, teaching and action.... In him, the human condition showed its face redeemed and the deepest human aspirations found fulfilment. He wants to communicate this harmonious fullness of life to people today" (n. 10). Yes, Jesus came so that all "may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10,10). And what context, more than that of health and suffering, awaits the announcement, the testimony and the service of the Gospel of life?

Imitating Christ, who has taken upon himself the "sorrowful" face of man to make it "glorious", the Church is called to walk the way of man, especially if he is suffering (cf. *Redemptor Hominis* nn. 7, 14, 21; *Salvifici doloris*, n. 3). Her action reaches out to the sick person to listen to him, take care of him, soothe his pain and open him to understanding the sense and salvific value of suffering. We can never insist enough, and you have done so in this Convention, on the need to put the person at the centre, both the sick and the health-care worker.

3. The Church appreciates how hard others work in this field and offer their support to public structures to respond to the needs of an integral care of the person.

In this the Church is motivated and sustained by a vision of health that is not merely the absence of sickness, but tension towards full harmony and healthy balance at the psychological, spiritual and social level. She offers a model of health inspired by the "healthy salvation" offered by Christ: an offering of "global", "integral" health that heals the sick person in his totality. The human experience of illness is thus illumined by the light of the Easter Mystery. Jesus crucified, "abandoned" by the Father, cries to him his request for help but, in an act of love and filial trust, he abandons himself to the Father's hands. In the crucified Messiah on Golgotha, the Church contemplates humanity trustingly stretching out its suffering arms to God. To those who suffer, she draws near with compassion and solidarity, making her own the divine sentiments of mercy. This service to man tried by sickness requires close collaboration between health care and pastoral workers, spiritual assistants and health-care volunteers. How precious is the action of various ecclesial associations of health care workers, whether they are professionals, doctors, nurses, pharmacists or more markedly pastoral and spiritual!

4. The religious institutes which, faithful to their charism, continue to have an important role in this sector, deserve special mention. I thank these male and female institutes for their witness offered with generosity and skill in the midst of many difficulties. I also ask them to preserve their

charisms, making them ever more recognizable in the present situation.

Theirs is a public service, which I hope never lacks proper recognition from the civil authorities. It is a service that requires a strong and convinced investment in the field of specific formation of health-care workers. These are "works of the Church", a patrimony and service of the Gospel of charity for all who are in need of care. These works must never lack the support of the entire ecclesial community.

Dear brothers and sisters! Here is a privileged area in which the Church is called to bear witness to the presence of the Risen Lord. To all who are involved I want to repeat what I wrote in *Novo Millennio ineunte*: "Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ" (n. 58). At the beginning of this century may those called, like the Good Samaritan, to bend down to care for man wounded and suffering, quicken their pace. May Mary, who watches maternally from Heaven over all who are tried by suffering, be the constant support of those who dedicate themselves to bringing relief.

With these sentiments, I gladly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.