



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS PIUS XII TO MEMBERS OF THE ARMY MEDICAL CORPS*

Tuesday, 13 February 1945

We are delighted to extend a welcome to you, distinguished members of the Army Medical Corps; and to express to you in person the satisfaction We felt on hearing of your congress here in Rome. Despite the demands of a violent and unabating war, you have found it possible, shall We not say necessary, to meet together for a few days to discuss the problems of your profession, and to perfect through mutual help the means of comforting and solving them. It shows that you are keenly alive to the first duty of every physician, to be constantly increasing his fund of knowledge, and to keep quite abreast of the scientific progress being made in his particular field.

This duty arises at once from the doctor's responsibility to the individual and the community. God is not the author of death. That monster gained entrance into the world through sin,—that original sin which, while it snuffed out the supernatural life in man's soul, laid heavy hand also on his body robbing it of that gift of immortality which God had willed to grant it despite the exigencies of its nature. And man began that struggle, more or less constant, more or less acute, against physical weakness, pain and suffering and decomposition that increasingly mark the stages of his path, until the point is reached when the inexorable sentence hanging over all flesh brings blessed relief. But in that struggle God has not abandoned the creature of His omnipotent love. « The most High hath created medicines out of the earth ; and a wise man will not abhor them . . . The virtue of these things is come to the knowledge of men; the most High hath given knowledge to men, that He may be honoured in His wonder s» (Eccli. 38, 4, 6). So you read in the Book of Ecclesiasticus; and the inspired writer continues: « My son, in thy sickness neglect not thyself; . . . give place to the physician, for the Lord hath created him; and let him not depart from thee, for his works are necessary » (Eccli. 38, 1).

Yes, necessary; and man's need will be the measure of the doctor's responsibility. How exalted, how worthy of all honour is the character of your profession! The doctor has been appointed by

God Himself to minister to the needs of suffering humanity. He who created that fever-consumed or mangled frame, now in your hands, who loves it with an eternal love, confides to you the ennobling charge of re-storing it to health. You will bring to the sick-room and to the operating table something of the charity of God, of the love and tenderness of Christ, the Master Physician of soul and body. That charity is not a superficial, irresolute sentiment; it does not write a diagnosis to please or curry favour; it is blind as well to the alluring trappings of wealth as to the unpleasant wretchedness of poverty or destitution; it is deaf to the appeals of base passion that would seek cooperation in evil-doing. For it is a love that embraces the whole man, a fellow human being, whose sickly body is still vivified by an immortal soul bonded by every right of creation and redemption to the will of its divine Master. That will is written clearly for those, who wish, to read, first in the essential scope that nature has manifestly attributed to the human organs, and then positively in the Ten Commandments. That genuine love will exclude any reason, however grave, that may be adduced as warrant for a patient or doctor to do or counsel aught that would contravene that supreme will.

That is why a doctor, worthy of his profession, rising to the full height of unselfish, fearless devotion to his noble mission of healing and saving life, will scorn any suggestion made to destroy life, however frail or humanly useless it may appear, knowing that unless a man is guilty of some crime deserving the death penalty, God alone, no power on earth, may dispose of his life. As a special minister of the God of nature he will never countenance the deliberate frustration of nature's priceless power to generate life. Uncompromisingly loyal to these and to other fundamental principles of Ethics and Christian Morality the medical profession will be the truest friend of the individual and the community, the firmest bulwark against enemies from without and within, a veritable channel of earthly and heavenly blessings to the nation which it honours. The skill of the physician shall raise him to eminence among men, and in the sight of great men he shall be praised; the gifts of the king shall be reserved for him (cfr. Eccli. 38, 2-2). That the blessing of the King of Kings may descend upon you and all your dear ones and your loved countries and remain forever, is the wish and prayer that rise from Our affectionate paternal heart.

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