



Stel zoals Maria vertrouwen in de barmhartige Jezus: doe wat Hij u opdraagt

Boodschap van Paus Franciscus voor de 24ste Wereld Ziekendag 2016



15 september 2015

Pope Francis

Entrusting Oneself to the Merciful Jesus like Mary: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The twenty-fourth World Day of the Sick offers me an opportunity to draw particularly close to you, dear friends who are ill, and to those who care for you.

This year, since the Day of the Sick will be solemnly celebrated in the Holy Land, I wish to propose a meditation on the Gospel account of the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2: 1-11), where Jesus performed his first miracle through the intervention of his Mother. The theme chosen – Entrusting Oneself to the Merciful Jesus like Mary: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5) is quite fitting in light of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. The main Eucharistic celebration of the Day will take place on 11 February 2016, the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, in Nazareth itself, where "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14). In Nazareth, Jesus began his salvific mission, applying to himself the words of the Prophet Isaiah, as we are told by the Evangelist Luke: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19).

Illness, above all grave illness, always places human existence in crisis and brings with it questions that dig deep. Our first response may at times be one of rebellion: Why has this happened to me? We can feel desperate, thinking that all is lost, that things no longer have meaning...

In these situations, faith in God is on the one hand tested, yet at the same time can reveal all of its positive resources. Not because faith makes illness, pain, or the questions which they raise, disappear, but because it offers a key by which we can discover the deepest meaning of what we are experiencing; a key that helps us to see how illness can be the way to draw nearer to Jesus who walks at our side, weighed down by the Cross. And this key is given to us by Mary, our Mother, who has known this way at first hand.

At the wedding feast of Cana, Mary is the thoughtful woman who sees a serious problem for the spouses: the wine, the symbol of the joy of the feast, has run out. Mary recognizes the difficulty, in some way makes it her own, and acts swiftly and discreetly. She does not simply look on, much less spend time in finding fault, but rather, she turns to Jesus and presents him with the concrete problem: "They have no wine" (Jn 2:3). And when Jesus tells her that it is not yet the time for him to reveal himself (cf. v. 4), she says to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you" (v. 5). Jesus then performs the miracle, turning water into wine, a wine that immediately appears to be the best of the whole celebration. What teaching can we draw from this mystery of the wedding feast of Cana for the World Day of the Sick?



The wedding feast of Cana is an image of the Church: at the centre there is Jesus who in his mercy performs a sign; around him are the disciples, the first fruits of the new community; and beside Jesus and the disciples is Mary, the provident and prayerful Mother. Mary partakes of the joy of ordinary people and helps it to increase; she intercedes with her Son on behalf of the spouses and all the invited guests. Nor does Jesus refuse the request of his Mother. How much hope there is in that event for all of us! We have a Mother with benevolent and watchful eyes, like her Son; a heart that is maternal and full of mercy, like him; hands that want to help, like the hands of Jesus who broke bread for those who were hungry, touched the sick and healed them. All this fills us with trust and opens our hearts to the grace and mercy of Christ. Mary's intercession makes us experience the consolation for which the apostle Paul blesses God: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. For as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow" (2 Cor 1:3-5). Mary is the "comforted" Mother who comforts her children.

At Cana the distinctive features of Jesus and his mission are clearly seen: he comes to the help of those in difficulty and need. Indeed, in the course of his messianic ministry he would heal many people of illnesses, infirmities and evil spirits, give sight to the blind, make the lame walk, restore health and dignity to lepers, raise the dead, and proclaim the good news to the poor (cf. Lk 7:21-22). Mary's request at the wedding feast, suggested by the Holy Spirit to her maternal heart, clearly shows not only Jesus' messianic power but also his mercy.

In Mary's concern we see reflected the tenderness of God. This same tenderness is present in the lives of all those persons who attend the sick and understand their needs, even the most imperceptible ones, because they look upon them with eyes full of love. How many times has a mother at the bedside of her sick child, or a child caring for an elderly parent, or a grandchild concerned for a grandparent, placed his or her prayer in the hands of Our Lady! For our loved ones who suffer because of illness we ask first for their health. Jesus himself showed the presence of the Kingdom of God specifically through his healings: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them" (Mt 11:4-5). But love animated by faith makes us ask for them something greater than physical health: we ask for peace, a serenity in life that comes from the heart and is God's gift, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, a gift which the Father never denies to those who ask him for it with trust.

In the scene of Cana, in addition to Jesus and his Mother, there are the "servants", whom she tells: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). Naturally, the miracle takes place as the work of Christ; however, he wants to employ human assistance in performing this miracle. He could have made the wine appear directly in the jars. But he wants to rely upon human cooperation, and so he asks the servants to fill them with water. How wonderful and pleasing to God it is to be servants of others! This more than anything else makes us like Jesus, who "did not come to be served but to serve" (Mk 10:45). These unnamed people in the Gospel teach us a great deal. Not only do they obey, but they obey generously: they fill the jars to the brim (cf. Jn 2:7). They trust the Mother and carry out immediately and well what they are asked to do, without complaining, without second thoughts.

On this World Day of the Sick let us ask Jesus in his mercy, through the intercession of Mary, his Mother and ours, to grant to all of us this same readiness to be serve those in need, and, in particular, our infirm brothers and sisters. At times this service can be tiring and burdensome, yet we are certain that the Lord will surely turn our human efforts into something divine. We too can be hands, arms and hearts which help God to perform his miracles, so often hidden. We too, whether healthy or sick, can offer up our toil and sufferings like the water which filled the jars at the wedding feast of Cana and was turned into the finest wine. By quietly helping those



who suffer, as in illness itself, we take our daily cross upon our shoulders and follow the Master (cf. Lk 9:23). Even though the experience of suffering will always remain a mystery, Jesus helps us to reveal its meaning.

If we can learn to obey the words of Mary, who says: “Do whatever he tells you”, Jesus will always change the water of our lives into precious wine. Thus this World Day of the Sick, solemnly celebrated in the Holy Land, will help fulfil the hope which I expressed in the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy: ‘I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with [Judaism and Islam] and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination’ (Misericordiae Vultus, 23). Every hospital and nursing home can be a visible sign and setting in which to promote the culture of encounter and peace, where the experience of illness and suffering, along with professional and fraternal assistance, helps to overcome every limitation and division.

For this we are set an example by the two Religious Sisters who were canonized last May: Saint Marie-Alphonsine Danil Ghattas and Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Baouardy, both daughters of the Holy Land. The first was a witness to meekness and unity, who bore clear witness to the importance of being responsible for one another other, living in service to one another. The second, a humble and illiterate woman, was docile to the Holy Spirit and became an instrument of encounter with the Muslim world.

To all those who assist the sick and the suffering I express my confident hope that they will draw inspiration from Mary, the Mother of Mercy. “May the sweetness of her countenance watch over us in this Holy Year, so that all of us may rediscover the joy of God’s tenderness” (ibid., 24), allow it to dwell in our hearts and express it in our actions! Let us entrust to the Virgin Mary our trials and tribulations, together with our joys and consolations. Let us beg her to turn her eyes of mercy towards us, especially in times of pain, and make us worthy of beholding, today and always, the merciful face of her Son Jesus!

With this prayer for all of you, I send my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 15 September 2015

Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows

“You are the flesh of Christ crucified that we have the honor to touch and to serve with love”

Pope’s Address to the Sick and Disabled in Turin



22 juni 2015
Paus Franciscus



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I could not come to Turin without stopping in this House: the Little House of Divine Providence, founded almost two centuries ago by Saint Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo. Inspired in the merciful love of God the Father and trusting totally in His Providence, he took in poor, abandoned and sick people who could not be received in the hospitals of that time.

The exclusion of the poor and the difficulty of the indigent to receive assistance and the necessary care is a situation that, unfortunately, is also present today. Great progress has been made in medicine and in social care, however a throwaway culture has also spread, as a consequence of an anthropological crisis that no longer puts man but consumption and economic interests at the center (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 52-53).

Among the victims of this disposable culture I would like to remember here the elderly, numerous of whom are received in this House — the elderly who are the memory and wisdom of peoples. Their longevity is not always seen as a gift of God, but sometimes as a weight that is difficult to sustain, especially when their health is strongly compromised. This mentality does not do good to society, and it is our task to develop “anti-bodies” against this way of regarding the elderly or persons with disabilities, as if they were lives no longer worthy of being lived. This is sin; it is a grave social sin. Instead, with what tenderness the Cottolengo has loved these persons! Here we can learn another way of looking at life and at the human person!

The Cottolengo has meditated long on the evangelical page of Jesus’ Last Judgment, Matthew’s chapter 25. And it has not remained deaf to Jesus’ appeals to be fed, quenched, clothed and visited. Pushed by the charity of Christ, it began a Work of charity in which the Word of God has demonstrated all its fruitfulness (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 233). From him we can learn the concreteness of evangelical love, so that many poor and sick can find a “house,” live as in a family, feel that they belong to the community and not excluded and endured.

Dear sick brothers, you are precious members of the Church; you are the flesh of Christ crucified that we have the honor to touch and to serve with love. With Jesus’ grace you can be witnesses and apostles of the Divine Mercy that saves the world. Looking at Christ crucified, full of love for us, and also with the help of all those who take care of you, may you find the strength and consolation to carry your cross every day.

The *raison d’être* of this Little House is not welfarism or philanthropy but the Gospel: the Gospel of the love of Christ is the force that gave it birth and makes it go forward: Jesus’ love of predilection for the most fragile and weak. This is at the center. Therefore, a work such as this does not go forward without prayer, which is the first and most important work of the Little House, as your Founder loved to repeat (cf. *Deti e pensieri*, n. 24), and as the six convents of Sisters of contemplative life demonstrate, which are linked to the Work itself

I want to thank the Sisters, the consecrated Brothers and the Priests present here at Turin and in your Houses scattered throughout the world. Together with the many lay workers, the volunteers and the “Friends of Cottolengo,” you are called to continue the mission of this great Saint of charity with creative fidelity. His charism is fecund, as demonstrated also by the Blesseds Don Francesco Paleari and Friar Luigi Bordino, as well as the Servant of God Sister Maria Carola Cecchin, missionary.

May the Holy Spirit give you always the strength and the courage to follow their example and to witness joyfully the charity of Christ that drives one to serve the weakest, thus contributing to the growth of the Kingdom of God and of a more hospitable and fraternal world.

I bless you all. May Our Lady protect you. And, please, do not forget to pray for me.



At the end of his meeting with the sick, the Holy Father went to the inner courtyard and greeted all those who did not find a place in the church and he spoke the following words off-the-cuff:

I greet you all, my heartfelt greeting to you! I thank you so much, so much for what you do for the sick, for the elderly and for what you do with tenderness, with so much love. I thank you so much and I ask you to pray for me, pray for the Church, pray for the children that are learning the catechism, pray for the children who are making their First Communion, pray for the parents, for the families, but from here pray for the Church, pray that the Lord may send priests, send Sisters, to do this work — so much work! And now we pray together to Our Lady and then I will give you the blessing. {Hail Mary}

Vertaling: ZENIT

Assisting the elderly and palliative care

Pauselijke Academie voor het Leven - 21e plenaire vergadering, Rome, 5-7 maart 2015

door dr. J.A. Raymakers, corresponderend lid van de Pauselijke Academie voor het Leven



De Pauselijke Academie voor het leven is een internationaal gezelschap van katholieke wetenschappers, ingesteld door de H. Paus Johannes Paulus II in 1994. Het is een denktank voor de Congregatie voor de Geloofsleer voor bio-ethische vraagstukken. Er zijn 44 voor het leven door de Paus benoemde leden en 84 corresponderende leden die voor perioden van 5 jaar worden benoemd. Van 5-7 maart 2015 werd de jaarlijks algemene vergadering gehouden.

Het onderwerp van de bijeenkomst van dit jaar was de palliatieve zorg in brede zin. De nadruk lag op de zorg voor alle patiënten met aandoeningen die niet curatief te benaderen zijn (dementie, andere degeneratieve neurologische en andere aandoeningen), in tegenstelling tot de ongeneeslijk zieke oncologische patiënten, aan wie bij palliatieve zorg doorgaans eerst gedacht wordt. Het besloten deel van de vergadering bevatte o.a. een audiëntie bij Paus Franciscus

Op vrijdag 6 maart 2015 werd de workshop “Assisting the elderly and palliative care” gehouden die ook voor belangstellenden en pers toegankelijk was. Er werden 15 voordrachten door experts uit de gehele wereld gehouden.

De voorzitter, Mgr Carasco de Paula wees op de verandering in opvatting die aan de ouderen veel minder een betekenisvolle plaats aan de maatschappij toekent. J.T. Panke wees erop dat verpleegkundige zorg, ook aan ouderen, aan Jezus zelf besteed wordt en als een groot voorrecht gezien moet worden. D. Sulmasy (USA) sprak over klinische besluitvorming en bracht daar het beginsel van de onderscheid tussen buitengewone en gewone middelen en proportionaliteit nog eens uitvoerig ter sprake. Het onderscheid is niet zuiver subjectief, twee componenten spelen een rol: de biomedische futiliteit en de onredelijke belasting. Hij wees erop dat bij de morele beoordeling van het handelen de betrekkelijke plicht van de zieke om zijn/haar leven te beschermen het uitgangspunt moet zijn en niet de morele zorgverplichting van de zorgverleners. Ook waarschuwde hij voor het



verwarren van therapeutische hardnekkigheid (therapeutic fury, acharnement thérapeutique, accanimento terapeutico) met het gebruik van buitengewone middelen. Preziosi benadrukte dat palliatieve zorg geen nihilisme is en wees anderzijds op de viervoudige toename van het gebruik van opiaten voor verkapte euthanasie in de USA van 1999-2010.

Opvallend waren ook de bijdragen van D. Roy (Canada) (Ethics and palliative care for the elderly) en J. Keown (USA) (Legal issues at the end of Life) en T. Thomas (India) die de rol die de familie in de zorg voor de oudere patiënt speelt in India toelichtte. P. Boitte (Fr) en A. Turriziani (It) bespraken de zorgrelatie, de mogelijkheden tot verbetering en het contact met de zieke ook als er geen verbale communicatie mogelijk is. Niet het uitvoeren van taken, maar het herkennen wat de zieke hoopt en bedoelt moet voorop staan. Het belang maar ook de betrekkelijkheid van advanced care directives werd benadrukt in de voordracht van C. Centenos Cortés (Spanje). De volledige tekst van de voordrachten zal zoals steeds in boekvorm verschijnen. C. Gastmans uit Leuven sprak naar aanleiding van de recente wetswijziging in België die euthanasie bij dementen toestaat en de achtergronden daarvan. Ook daar kwam de rol van advanced directives ter sprake. Hij constateert een overmatige nadruk op cognitie en op individuele autonomie en een tekort aan dialoog en begrip voor de situatie van de zieke nu. L. Pessini (Braz.) sprak over tendensen als transhumanisme, de ontkenning van het ouder worden en de ontkenning van de menselijke waardigheid en van de betekenis van kwetsbaarheid als een waarde. Men ziet de mens doorgaans als toerist en consument terwijl hij een pelgrim moet zijn. Hij pleitte voor het ontdekken van een esthetiek in de zorg, interesse voor de schoonheid van de medemens.

Eenzaamheid is meest zorgwekkende aandoening van ouderen

“Abandonment is the gravest sickness of the elderly, and also the greatest injustice they can suffer”



Toespraak van Paus Franciscus tot de deelnemers van de 21ste Plenaire Vergadering van de Pauselijke Academie voor het Leven, “Assistance to the Elderly and Palliative Care”

5 maart 2015

Paus Franciscus

Geliefde broeder en zusters,

Ik groet u hartelijk bij gelegenheid van uw Algemene vergadering, die is bijeengeroepen om na te denken over het thema: “Hulp voor de ouderen en palliatieve zorg”. Ik dank de president voor zijn vriendelijke woorden. Ik wil graag in het bijzonder Kardinaal Sgreccia verwelkomen, die hierin een pionier is. Dank u.

De palliatieve zorg is de uitdrukking van de echt menselijke houding om de zorg voor een ander op zich te nemen, in het bijzonder van wie lijdt. Het is het bewijs dat de menselijke persoon altijd kostbaar blijft, ook als die getekend is door ouderdom en ziekte. Inderdaad de persoon, in welke omstandigheden hij ook verkeert, is een goed, voor zichzelf en voor de anderen en wordt door God bemind. Daardoor voelen we de



verantwoordelijkheid hem bij te staan en zo goed mogelijk te begeleiden wanneer zijn leven erg broos wordt en wanneer de voltooiing van het aardse bestaan nadert.

Het Bijbelse gebod dat ons vraagt om onze ouders te eren herinnert ons in brede zin aan de eer die we verschuldigd zijn aan alle ouderen. God heeft een dubbele belofte aan dit gebod verbonden: “Opdat ge lang moogt leven” (Ex 20,12) en “gelukkig zijn” (Deut 5, 16). De trouw aan het vierde gebod verzekert ons niet alleen van de gave van de aarde maar bovenal van de mogelijkheid ervan te genieten. Inderdaad, de wijsheid die ons de waarde van de bejaarde persoon doet erkennen en ons er toe brengt haar te eren is dezelfde wijsheid die ons met instemming doet waarderen de talrijke gaven die we dagelijks uit de hand van de Vader, van zijn voorzienigheid ontvangen en daardoor gelukkig zijn. Het gebod onthult ons de fundamentele opvoedkundige betrekking tussen ouders en kinderen, de ouderen en de jongeren onder verwijzing naar de bewaking en de overdracht van het godsdienstige onderricht en de wijsheid aan de komende generaties. Het in ere houden van dit onderricht en hen die het overdragen is een bron van leven en van zegen.

Daarentegen bevat de Bijbel bewaart een ernstige waarschuwing voor hen die hun ouders verwaarlozen of mishandelen (vgl. Ex 21, 17; Lev 20, 9). Datzelfde oordeel geldt vandaag wanneer de ouders, als zij oud en minder nuttig zijn geworden, gemarginaliseerd worden tot verwaarlozing toe; hoeveel voorbeelden hebben we daar niet van!

Het woord van God is altijd levend en we zien heel goed welke vooraanstaande plaats het gebod inneemt in de harde realiteit van de hedendaagse maatschappij, waar de logica van de nuttigheid de overhand heeft over die van de solidariteit en de vrijgevigheid, zelfs binnen de gezinnen. Laten we daarom met een volgzaam hart luisteren naar het woord van God, dat tot ons komt in de geboden die, laten we dat steeds bedenken, geen knellende banden zijn maar woorden van leven.

“Eren” kan vandaag de dag zuiver vertaald worden als: het moeten hebben van een groot respect en de zorg op zich nemen voor hen die door hun fysieke of maatschappelijke situatie dreigen te worden alleen gelaten om te sterven of te doen sterven. De gehele geneeskunde heeft binnen de maatschappij een speciale rol als getuige van de eer die we verschuldigd zijn aan de oudere persoon en aan ieder menselijk wezen. Wetenschappelijk bewijs en doelmatigheid kunnen niet de enige criteria zijn die het handelen van de artsen regeren, evenmin als de voorschriften van de gezondheidsorganisatie en het economische voordeel. Een staat mag niet denken dat hij aan de gezondheidszorg kan verdienen. In tegendeel, geen plicht is voor een maatschappij belangrijker dan het bewaken van de menselijke persoon.

Uw bent de komende dagen bezig met het onderzoek van nieuwe gebieden voor de toepassing van palliatieve zorg. Tot nu toe bestonden die in een waardevolle begeleiding van de oncologische patiënten, maar vandaag zijn er vele aandoeningen, vaak gebonden aan de ouderdom, gekenmerkt door een chronische progressieve achteruitgang, die baat kunnen hebben bij dit type zorg. De ouderen hebben in de eerste plaats de zorg van hun familieleden nodig wier genegenheid niet vervangen kan worden door een meer efficiënte organisatie of door nog meer competente en liefdevolle werkers in de gezondheidszorg. Wanneer de ouderen niet meer zelfstandig kunnen leven of gevorderde of terminale ziekten hebben dan moeten ze kunnen genieten van werkelijk menselijke hulp en adequate antwoorden ontvangen op hun noden dank zij de palliatieve zorg die geboden wordt ter completering en ondersteuning van de zorg die de familie geeft. De palliatieve zorg heeft tot doel het lijden in de finale fase van de ziekte te verlichten en tegelijkertijd de zieke te verzekeren van een werkelijk menselijke begeleiding (vgl. Encycliek *Evangelium vitae*, 65). Het is een belangrijke ondersteuning vooral voor de ouderen, zij die op grond van hun leeftijd steeds minder aandacht krijgen van de curatieve geneeskunde en vaak in de steek gelaten worden. Het in de steek gelaten worden is de ernstigste “ziekte” van de oudere en ook de grootste onrechtvaardigheid die hem kan overkomen. Zij die ons hebben geholpen op te



groeien mogen niet in de steek gelaten worden wanneer ze behoefte hebben aan onze hulp, onze liefde en onze tederheid.

Daarom waardeer ik uw wetenschappelijke en culturele inzet om te verzekeren dat de palliatieve zorg allen kan bereiken die haar nodig hebben. Ik moedig de professionals en de studenten aan om zich te specialiseren in dit type zorg, dat niet minder waarde heeft omdat het “geen levens redt”. De palliatieve zorg verwerkelijkt iets dat even belangrijk is: de versterking van persoon. Ik spoor allen aan die zich om verschillende redenen inzetten op het gebied van de palliatieve zorg, om die inzet ten uitvoer te brengen in een geest van dienstbaarheid en te bedenken dat alle medische kennis pas echt wetenschap is in de edelste betekenis, als zij zich opstelt als hulp met het oog op het goed van de mens, een goed dat nooit bereikt kan worden in strijd met zijn leven en zijn waardigheid.

Het is dit vermogen van dienst aan het leven en aan de waardigheid van de zieke persoon, ook als die oud is, dat een maat is voor de ware vooruitgang van de geneeskunde en van de hele maatschappij. Ik herhaal de oproep van de heilige Johannes Paulus II: “respecteer, verdedig, bemin en dien het leven, elk menselijk leven! Alleen langs die weg zul je rechtvaardigheid, vooruitgang, ware vrijheid, vrede en geluk vinden!” (ibid., 5).

Ik wens u toe dat u uw studie en onderzoek moogt voortzetten, opdat het werk van de bevordering en de verdediging van het leven steeds doeltreffender en vruchtbaarder moge zijn. Daarbij helpe u de Moedermaagd, Moeder van het leven en daarbij begeleide u mijn apostolische zegen. Vergeet alstublieft niet voor mij te bidden. Dank u.

Nederlandse vertaling: J.A. Raymakers

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I warmly welcome you on the occasion of your General Assembly, called to reflect on the theme “Assistance to the elderly and palliative care”, and I thank the President for his kind words. I am especially pleased to greet Cardinal Sgreccia, who is a pioneer.... Thank you.

Palliative care is an expression of the truly human attitude of taking care of one another, especially of those who suffer. It is a testimony that the human person is always precious, even if marked by illness and old age. Indeed, the person, under any circumstances, is an asset to him/herself and to others and is loved by God. This is why, when their life becomes very fragile and the end of their earthly existence approaches, we feel the responsibility to assist and accompany them in the best way.

The biblical Commandment that calls us to honour our parents, reminds us in a broader sense of the honour that we owe to all elderly people. God associates with this Commandment a twofold promise: “that your days may be long” (Ex 20:12) and the other — “that it may go well with you” (Dt 5:16). Faithfulness to the fourth Commandment ensures not only the gift of land but the opportunity to enjoy it. Indeed, the wisdom that enables us to recognize the value of our elders and leads us to honour them, is the same wisdom that allows us to happily appreciate the many gifts we receive every day from the provident hand of the Father.

This precept shows us the fundamental pedagogical relationship between parents and children, between old and young, regarding the safekeeping and passing on of wisdom and religious teaching to future generations. To honour this teaching and those who transmit it is a source of life and blessing. On the contrary, the Bible reserves a severe admonition for those who neglect or mistreat their parents (cf. Ex 21:17; Lev 20:9). The same judgement applies today when parents, becoming aged and less useful, are marginalized to the point of abandonment; and we have so many examples of this!



The word of God is ever living and we clearly see how the Commandment proves central for contemporary society, where the logic of usefulness takes precedence over that of solidarity and of gratuitousness, even within the family. Therefore, let us listen with docile hearts to the word of God that comes to us from the Commandments which, let us always remember, are not bonds that imprison, but are words of life.

Today “to honour” could also be translated as the duty to have the utmost respect and to take care of those who, due to their physical or social condition, may be left to die or “made to die”. All of medicine has a special role within society as a witness to the honour that we owe to the elderly person and to each human being. Evidence and effectiveness cannot be the only criteria that govern physicians’ actions, nor can health system regulations and economic profits. A state cannot think about earning with medicine. On the contrary, there is no duty more important for a society than that of safeguarding the human person.

Your work during these days has been to explore new fields of application for palliative care. It has until now been a precious accompaniment for cancer patients, but today there is a great variety of diseases characterized by chronic progressive deterioration, often linked to old age, which can benefit from this type of assistance. The elderly need in the first place the care of their family members — whose affection cannot be replaced by even the most efficient structures or the most skilled and charitable healthcare workers. When not self-sufficient or having advanced or terminal disease, the elderly can enjoy truly human assistance and have their needs adequately met thanks to palliative care offered in conjunction with the supportive care given by family members. The objective of palliative care is to alleviate suffering in the final stages of illness and at the same time to ensure the patient appropriate human accompaniment (cf. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 65). It is important support especially for the elderly, who, because of their age, receive increasingly less attention from curative medicine and are often abandoned. Abandonment is the most serious “illness” of the elderly, and also the greatest injustice they can be submitted to: those who have helped us grow must not be abandoned when they are in need of our help, our love and our tenderness.

Thus I appreciate your scientific and cultural commitment to ensuring that palliative care may reach all those who need it. I encourage professionals and students to specialize in this type of assistance which is no less valuable for the fact that it “is not life-saving”. Palliative care accomplishes something equally important: it values the person. I exhort all those who, in various ways, are involved in the field of palliative care, to practice this task keeping the spirit of service intact and remembering that all medical knowledge is truly science, in its noblest significance, only if used as aid in view of the good of man, a good which is never accomplished “against” the life and dignity of man.

It is this ability to serve life and the dignity of the sick, also when they are old, that is the true measure of medicine and society as a whole. I repeat St John Paul II’s appeal: “respect, protect, love and serve life, every human life! Only in this direction will you find justice, development, true freedom, peace and happiness! (ibid., n. 5).

I hope you continue this study and research, so that the work of the advancement and defence of life may be ever more effective and fruitful. May the Virgin Mother, Mother of life, accompany my Blessing. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.



Sapientia Cordis: “I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame”

Message for the 23rd World Day of the Sick 2015

3 december 2014

Pope Francis



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this, the twenty-third World Day of the Sick, begun by Saint John Paul II, I turn to all of you who are burdened by illness and are united in various ways to the flesh of the suffering Christ, as well as to you, professionals and volunteers in the field of health care.

This year's theme invites us to reflect on a phrase from the Book of Job: “I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame” (Job 29:15). I would like to consider this phrase from the perspective of “sapientia cordis” – the wisdom of the heart.

1. This “wisdom” is no theoretical, abstract knowledge, the product of reasoning. Rather, it is, as Saint James describes it in his Letter, “pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity” (3:17). It is a way of seeing things infused by the Holy Spirit in the minds and the hearts of those who are sensitive to the sufferings of their brothers and sisters and who can see in them the image of God. So let us take up the prayer of the Psalmist: “Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps 90:12). This “sapientia cordis”, which is a gift of God, is a compendium of the fruits of the World Day of the Sick.

2. Wisdom of the heart means serving our brothers and sisters. Job's words: “I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame”, point to the service which this just man, who enjoyed a certain authority and a position of importance amongst the elders of his city, offered to those in need. His moral grandeur found expression in the help he gave to the poor who sought his help and in his care for orphans and widows (Job 29:12-13).

Today too, how many Christians show, not by their words but by lives rooted in a genuine faith, that they are “eyes to the blind” and “feet to the lame”! They are close to the sick in need of constant care and help in washing, dressing and eating. This service, especially when it is protracted, can become tiring and burdensome. It is relatively easy to help someone for a few days but it is difficult to look after a person for months or even years, in some cases when he or she is no longer capable of expressing gratitude. And yet, what a great path of sanctification this is! In those difficult moments we can rely in a special way on the closeness of the Lord, and we become a special means of support for the Church's mission.

3. Wisdom of the heart means being with our brothers and sisters. Time spent with the sick is holy time. It is a way of praising God who conforms us to the image of his Son, who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). Jesus himself said: “I am among you as one who serves” (Lk 22:27).

With lively faith let us ask the Holy Spirit to grant us the grace to appreciate the value of our often unspoken



willingness to spend time with these sisters and brothers who, thanks to our closeness and affection, feel more loved and comforted. How great a lie, on the other hand, lurks behind certain phrases which so insist on the importance of “quality of life” that they make people think that lives affected by grave illness are not worth living!

4. Wisdom of the heart means going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters. Occasionally our world forgets the special value of time spent at the bedside of the sick, since we are in such a rush; caught up as we are in a frenzy of doing, of producing, we forget about giving ourselves freely, taking care of others, being responsible for others. Behind this attitude there is often a lukewarm faith which has forgotten the Lord’s words: “You did it unto me” (Mt 25:40).

For this reason, I would like once again to stress “the absolute priority of ‘going forth from ourselves toward our brothers and sisters’ as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God’s completely free gift” (Evangeli Gaudium, 179). The missionary nature of the Church is the wellspring of an “effective charity and a compassion which understands, assists and promotes” (ibid).

5. Wisdom of the heart means showing solidarity with our brothers and sisters while not judging them. Charity takes time. Time to care for the sick and time to visit them. Time to be at their side like Job’s friends: “And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great” (Job 2:13). Yet Job’s friends harboured a judgement against him: they thought that Job’s misfortune was a punishment from God for his sins. True charity is a sharing which does not judge, which does not demand the conversion of others; it is free of that false humility which, deep down, seeks praise and is self-satisfied about whatever good it does.

Job’s experience of suffering finds its genuine response only in the cross of Jesus, the supreme act of God’s solidarity with us, completely free and abounding in mercy. This response of love to the drama of human pain, especially innocent suffering, remains for ever impressed on the body of the risen Christ; his glorious wounds are a scandal for faith but also the proof of faith (cf. Homily for the Canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II, 27 April 2014).

Even when illness, loneliness and inability make it hard for us to reach out to others, the experience of suffering can become a privileged means of transmitting grace and a source for gaining and growing in sapientia cordis. We come to understand how Job, at the end of his experience, could say to God: “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you” (42:5). People immersed in the mystery of suffering and pain, when they accept these in faith, can themselves become living witnesses of a faith capable of embracing suffering, even without being able to understand its full meaning.

6. I entrust this World Day of the Sick to the maternal protection of Mary, who conceived and gave birth to Wisdom incarnate: Jesus Christ, our Lord.

O Mary, Seat of Wisdom, intercede as our Mother for all the sick and for those who care for them! Grant that, through our service of our suffering neighbours, and through the experience of suffering itself, we may receive and cultivate true wisdom of heart!

With this prayer for all of you, I impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 3 December 2014

Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier



FRANCIS

Paus veroordeelt abortus, euthanasie en IVF als 'zonden tegen God'

Katholiek Nieuwsblad, 16 november 2014

[KatholiekNieuwsblad](#)

De paus zei dat zaterdag tegen vierduizend artsen van de Katholieke Vereniging van Italiaanse artsen. Die waren in het Vaticaan voor een bijzondere audiëntie met de paus in verband met het 70-jarig jubileum van de vereniging.

'Zorg lijkt af te nemen'

De paus benadrukte in zijn toespraak dat elk menselijk leven, ongeacht de omstandigheden, heilig is en dat "spelen met het leven", zoals abortus, euthanasie en ivf, zondig is. Ondanks de wetenschappelijke en technische ontwikkelingen waardoor de mogelijkheden tot lichamelijke genezing zijn toegenomen, lijkt het erop, zei de paus, dat "in onze tijd" de zorg voor de persoon lijkt af te nemen, "vooral wanneer hij ziek, zwak en hulpeloos is".

Volgens de paus kunnen de verworvenheden van de wetenschap en de geneeskunde bijdragen "aan de verbetering van het menselijk leven in de mate waarin ze niet gedistantieerd zijn van het ethische fundament van deze disciplines".

'Diepere dimensie van het bestaan'

De paus zei dat "aandacht voor het menselijk leven" en in het bijzonder voor "de zieken, ouderen en kinderen" ten diepste tot de missie van de Kerk behoort. "De Kerk voelt zich ook geroepen deel te nemen in het debat dat betrekking heeft op het menselijk leven en voorstellen te doen gebaseerd op het Evangelie", aldus Franciscus.

Volgens de paus wordt tegenwoordig "de kwaliteit van het leven vooral gerelateerd aan economische middelen" en aan "het 'welzijn', de schoonheid en het genot van het fysieke". Daarmee wordt vergeten dat er een "andere, diepere dimensie van het bestaan" is, "een interpersoonlijke, spirituele en religieuze", aldus Franciscus.

'Leven is altijd heilig'

"In het licht van het geloof en de juiste reden is menselijk leven altijd heilig en van kwaliteit", zei de paus. "Elk menselijk leven is heilig. Het ene leven is niet kwalitatief belangrijker dan het andere, enkel op grond van middelen, rechten of sociale en economische kansen."

'Evangelie gaat verder dan eed van Hippocrates'

Franciscus zei tegen de artsen dat zij in hun werk "door woord en voorbeeld" kunnen getuigen dat het "menselijk leven heilig, waardevol en onschendbaar" is en dat het "als zodanig moet worden bemind, verdedigd en verzorgd". De paus hield de artsen voor dat de eed van Hippocrates hun verplicht "om altijd dienaren van het leven" te zijn, maar dat het Evangelie verder gaat en laat zien om van het leven "te houden wat er ook gebeurt" en in het bijzonder "wanneer het behoefte heeft speciale zorg en aandacht".

'Valse compassie'



Franciscus waarschuwde de artsen voor de “valse compassie” die “het dominante denken” soms suggereert.

De paus verduidelijkte dat dit zich uit in de moderne opvattingen over het toestaan van abortus, het “verkrijgen van euthanasie, als een daad van waardigheid”, het ‘produceren’ van een kind als een recht en een wetenschappelijke doorbraak “in plaats van een cadeau” en over het gebruik van mensenlevens als proefkonijn “om anderen te redden”.

‘Spelen met het leven’

“Trouw zijn aan het Evangelie van het leven en respect voor het leven als geschenk van God, vraagt moedige keuzes die ingaan tegen huidige opvattingen, die gewetensbezwaren kunnen opleveren. Deze trouw heeft sociale consequenties. We leven in een tijd waarin geëxperimenteerd wordt met het leven. Het is een slecht experiment. Het ‘maken’ van kinderen in plaats van ze te aanvaarden als een geschenk is spelen met het leven. Wees voorzichtig, omdat dit een zonde is tegen de Schepper, tegen God de Schepper, die alles zo geschapen heeft”, aldus Franciscus.

‘Wetenschappelijk probleem’

De paus vertelde de artsen dat hij als priester vaak bezwaren hoorde over en de vraag kreeg waarom de Kerk bijvoorbeeld tegen abortus is. Volgens de paus is het geen religieus en filosofisch probleem, maar een “wetenschappelijk probleem, omdat het niet geoorloofd is een menselijk leven te doden om een probleem op te lossen”.

‘Denk goed na’

De paus vertelde dat hij op de tegenwerping “maar nee, het moderne denken” antwoordde: “luister, in het oude denken en het moderne denken betekent het woord ‘dood’ hetzelfde. Hetzelfde geldt voor euthanasie. We weten allemaal dat er in de huidige wegwerpcultuur, met zoveel oude mensen, verborgen euthanasie is. Andersom zijn er ook mensen die tegen God zeggen: ‘nee, ik zal het levenseinde bereiken op de manier zoals ik dat wil’. Een zonde tegen God de Schepper. Denk hier goed over na”, aldus de paus.

I welcome you on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the Association of Italian Catholic Doctors. In particular, I address a cordial greeting to the chaplain, Msgr. Edward Menichelli, to Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini, who for decades has followed the life of the Association, and to the President, whom I thank for the words with which he introduced this meeting. With gratitude, I greet the Minister of Health, Mrs. Beatrice Lorenzin. And with great affection, I welcome these sick children and their families.

There is no doubt that, in our time, due to scientific and technical advancements, the possibilities for physical healing have significantly increased; and yet, in some respects it seems the ability to “take care” of the person has decreased, especially when he is sick, frail and helpless. In fact, the achievements of science and of medicine can contribute to the improvement of human life to the extent that they are not distanced from the ethical root of these disciplines. For this reason, you Catholic doctors are committed to live your profession as a human and spiritual mission, as a real lay apostolate.

Attention to human life, especially that in greatest difficulty, that is, to the sick, the elderly, children, deeply involves the mission of the Church. The Church also feels called to participate in the debate that relates to human life, presenting its proposal based on the Gospel. In many places, the quality of life is related primarily to economic means, to “well-being”, to the beauty and enjoyment of the physical, forgetting other more profound dimensions of existence — interpersonal, spiritual and religious. In fact, in the light of faith and right reason, human life is always sacred and always “of quality”. There is no human life that is more sacred than another — every human life is sacred — just as there is no human life qualitatively more significant than another, only by



virtue of resources, rights, great social and economic opportunities.

This is what you, Catholic doctors, try to say, first of all with your professionalism. Your work wants to witness by word and by example that human life is always sacred, valuable and inviolable. And as such, it must be loved, defended and cared for. Your professionalism, enriched with the spirit of faith, is one more reason to work with those— even from different religious perspectives or thought—who recognize the dignity of the human person as a criterion for their activities. In fact, if the Hippocratic Oath commits you to always be servants of life, the Gospel pushes you further: to love it no matter what, especially when it is in need of special care and attention. This is what the members of your Association have done over seventy years of fine work. I urge you to continue with humility and trust on this road, striving to pursue your statutory goals of implementing the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church in the field of medical ethics.

The dominant thinking sometimes suggests a “false compassion”, that which believes that it is: helpful to women to promote abortion; an act of dignity to obtain euthanasia; a scientific breakthrough to “produce” a child and to consider it to be a right rather than a gift to welcome; or to use human lives as guinea pigs presumably to save others. Instead, the compassion of the Gospel is that which accompanies in times of need, that is, the compassion of the Good Samaritan, who “sees”, “has compassion”, approaches and provides concrete help (cf. Lk 10:33). Your mission as doctors puts you in daily contact with many forms of suffering. I encourage you to take them on as “Good Samaritans”, caring in a special way for the elderly, the infirm and the disabled. Fidelity to the Gospel of life and respect for life as a gift from God sometimes require choices that are courageous and go against the current, which in particular circumstances, may become points of conscientious objection. And this fidelity entails many social consequences. We are living in a time of experimentation with life. But a bad experiment. Making children rather than accepting them as a gift, as I said. Playing with life. Be careful, because this is a sin against the Creator: against God the Creator, who created things this way. When so many times in my life as a priest I have heard objections: “But tell me, why the Church is opposed to abortion, for example? Is it a religious problem?” No, no. It is not a religious problem. “Is it a philosophical problem?” No, it is not a philosophical problem. It’s a scientific problem, because there is a human life there, and it is not lawful to take out a human life to solve a problem. “But no, modern thought...” But, listen, in ancient thought and modern thought, the word “kill” means the same thing. The same evaluation applies to euthanasia: we all know that with so many old people, in this culture of waste, there is this hidden euthanasia. But there is also the other. And this is to say to God, “No, I will accomplish the end of life, as I will.” A sin against God the Creator! Think hard about this.

I hope the seventy years of your association will stimulate a further process of growth and maturation. May you work constructively with all the people and institutions who share your love of life and seek to serve it in its dignity, sanctity and inviolability. St. Camillus de Lellis, in suggesting the most effective method in caring for the sick, would simply say: “Put more heart into those hands.” Put more heart in these hands! This is also my hope. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, *Salus infirmorum*, support the intentions with which you intend to continue your action. I ask you to please pray for me and I give you my heartfelt blessing.

Respect voor de Schepping



Vijfde catechese in de reeks over de zeven gaven van de Heilige Geest: Kennis



21 mei 2014

Paus Franciscus

Geliefde broers en zussen, goede dag.

Vandaag zou ik schijnwerper willen richten op een andere gave van de Heilige Geest, de gave van kennis. Wanneer over kennis gesproken wordt, denkt men onmiddellijk aan het vermogen van de mens om altijd beter de werkelijkheid die hem omgeeft te kennen en de wetten te ontdekken die de natuur en het heelal ordenen. De kennis die van de Heilige Geest komt, beperkt zich echter niet tot de menselijke kennis: het is een bijzondere gave, die ons ertoe brengt, via de schepping, de grootheid en de liefde van God en zijn diepe verbondenheid met elk schepsel, te vatten.

1. Wanneer onze ogen door de Heilige Geest verlicht worden, openen ze zich voor de contemplatie van God in de schoonheid van de natuur en in de grootsheid van de kosmos en ze brengen ons tot de ontdekking hoe alles van Hem en van zijn liefde spreekt. Dit alles wekt in ons een grote verbazing en een diep gevoel van dankbaarheid! Het is het gevoel dat we ook ervaren wanneer we tot bewondering komen voor een kunstwerk of voor een wonderbaarlijke vrucht van het genie en van de creativiteit van de mens. Ten overstaan van dit alles brengt de Geest ons ertoe de Heer uit het diepst van ons hart te loven en in alles wat we hebben en zijn, een onschatbare gave van God en een teken van zijn oneindige liefde voor ons te erkennen.

2. In het eerste hoofdstuk van het boek Genesis, dus werkelijk aan het begin van heel de Bijbel, wordt benadrukt dat God behagen heeft in zijn schepping door herhaaldelijk de schoonheid en de goedheid van elk schepsel te onderlijnen. Aan het eind van elke scheppingsdag staat geschreven: "God zag dat het goed was" (Gen. 1, 12.18.21.25). Als God ziet dat elk schepsel goed en schoon is, dan moeten ook wij diezelfde houding aannemen en zien dat elk schepsel goed en schoon is. Het is de gave van kennis die ons deze schoonheid doet zien, daarom ook loven we God en danken Hem omdat Hij ons zoveel schoonheid geschonken heeft. En wanneer God de schepping van de mens voltooide wordt niet gezegd: "Hij zag dat het goed was", maar Hij zei dat het "zeer goed" was (Gen. 1, 31). In de ogen van God zijn wij het mooiste, het grootste en het beste van heel de schepping. Zelfs de engelen komen na ons, wij zijn meer dan de engelen, zoals we horen in het Boek der Psalmen. De Heer houdt van ons! We moeten Hem daarvoor danken. De gave van kennis brengt ons tot diepe overeenstemming met de Schepper en helpt ons deelhebben aan de helderheid van zijn blik en van zijn oordeel. Het is vanuit dit gezichtspunt dat we kunnen vatten dat man en vrouw het toppunt van de schepping zijn, als de voltooiing van een plan van liefde dat in elk van ons geprent is en dat ons elkaar als broers en zussen doet erkennen.

3. Dit alles is motief voor rust en vrede en maakt van de Christen een blijde getuigen van God, in het spoor van Sint Franciscus van Assisi en van vele heiligen die, door de contemplatie van de schepping ertoe kwamen God te loven en zijn liefde te bezingen. Tegelijk helpt de gave van kennis ons ook niet te vervallen in een aantal overdrijvingen of verkeerde houdingen. De eerst bestaat in het gevaar dat we ons als eigenaars van de schepping gaan gedragen. De schepping is geen eigendom waarover van we believe de baas kunnen spelen; en zeker is ze geen eigendom van slechts enkelen, van weinigen. De schepping is een schitterend geschenk dat God ons gegeven heeft om er zorg voor te dragen en te gebruiken ten bate van allen, met niet aflatende



eerbied en dankbaarheid. De tweede verkeerde houding bestaat in de bekoring om bij de schepselen te blijven stilstaan, alsof zij op al onze verwachtingen het antwoord kunnen zijn. Met de gave van kennis helpt de Geest ons deze vergissing niet te begaan.

Maar ik wil terugkomen op de eerste verkeerde weg: de baas spelen over de schepping in plaats van haar te behoeden. We moeten de schepping behoeden omdat ze een geschenk van God is, het geschenk van God aan ons; wij zijn de behoeders van de schepping. Als we de schepping uitbuiten, vernietigen we het teken van de liefde van God. De schepping vernietigen is aan God zeggen "ik houd er niet van". En dat is niet goed: dat is de zonde.

De schepping behoeden, is eigenlijk de gave van God behoeden en aan God zeggen: "Dank, ik ben hoeder van de schepping om haar vooruit te doen gaan, nooit om Uw geschenk te vernietigen". Dit moet onze houding tegenover de schepping zijn: haar behoeden want, als wij de schepping vernietigen, zal de schepping ons vernietigen. Vergeet dit niet. Eens was ik op het platteland en hoorde ik de uitspraak van een eenvoudige mens die van bloemen hield en er voor zorgde. Hij zei me: "We moeten deze mooie dingen die God ons geschonken heeft behoeden. De schepping is er voor ons opdat we er goed gebruik van zouden maken, niet om haar uit te buiten maar om haar te behoeden, want God vergeeft altijd, wij mensen vergeven af en toe, maar de schepping vergeeft nooit en als jij haar niet behoedt zal zij je vernietigen".

Dit moet ons tot nadenken stemmen en ons aan de Heilige Geest de gave van kennis doen vragen om goed te verstaan dat de schepping het mooiste geschenk van God is. Hij heeft zoveel goede dingen gemaakt voor het beste dat er is en dat is de menselijke persoon.

Overgenomen met toestemming van [RK Documenten.nl](http://RKDocumenten.nl)

Bekijk dit document in de context van andere R.K. documenten op de website van RK Documenten.nl

Herken Christus in de lijdenden

Address to participants in the plenary session of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers (for Health Pastoral Care)

24 March 2014
Pope Francis



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I welcome you on the occasion of your Plenary Session and I thank Archbishop Zimowski for his words. The Bishop of Rome is grateful to each of you for your commitment to the many brothers and sisters who bear the burden of sickness, disability, and difficult old age.

Your work in these days is inspired by what John Paul II said of suffering, 30 years ago, in the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*: "to do good by one's suffering and to do good to those who suffer" (n. 30). John Paul II lived and witnessed to these words in an exemplary way. His was a living magisterium, which the People of God



reciprocated with so much affection and veneration, recognizing that God was with him.

It is true, in fact, that also in suffering no one is ever alone because God — in his merciful love for man and for the world — embraces even the most inhumane situations, in which the image of the Creator, present in everyone, is blurred or disfigured. Thus it was for Jesus in his Passion. In Him every human pain, every anxiety, every suffering was taken on out of love, out of pure desire to be close to us, to be with us. And here, in Jesus' Passion, is the greatest lesson for anyone who wants to dedicate him-herself to serving our sick and suffering brothers.

The experience of fraternal sharing with those who suffer opens us to the true beauty of human life which includes its frailty. In protecting and promoting life, at any stage or condition, we can recognize the dignity and value of every single human being, from conception until death.

Tomorrow we will celebrated the Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord. "The one who accepted 'Life' in the name of all and for the sake of all was Mary, the Virgin Mother; she is thus most closely and personally associated with the Gospel of life" (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 102). Mary offered up her own existence, she made her whole self available to the will of God, becoming a "place" of his presence, a "place" in which the Son of God dwells.

Dear friends, in exercising your daily service, let us keep ever present the flesh of Christ present in the poor, in those suffering, in children, also in the unwanted, in those with physical or mental disabilities and in the elderly.

Thus I invoke upon each of you, upon all those who are sick and suffering together with their families, as well as upon all those who take care of them, the maternal protection of Mary, *Salus infirmorum*, so that she may illumine your reflection and your action in defending and promoting life and in health pastoral care. May the Lord bless you.

Veroudering en invaliditeit

De Pontificia Academia pro Vita (PAV), ingesteld bij *Motu proprio* door de zalige Paus Johannes Paulus II in 1994 op aanraden van Prof. Jérôme Lejeune, vierde haar 20e verjaardag met de bespreking van het thema 'Aging and disability'.

Zorg voor ouderen, gehandicapten en ernstig zieken

Message of Pope Francis to Participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy For Life on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of its Founding



20 February 2014
Pope Francis



To my Venerable Brother Bishop Carrasco de Paula, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life

I extend my cordial greetings to you, to Your Eminences, and to all the participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of its founding. On this occasion our grateful thoughts turn to Blessed John Paul II, who established this Academy, as well as to all of the Presidents who have promoted its activity and all those who, throughout the world, collaborate in its mission. The specific task of the Academy, as expressed in the *Motu Proprio Vitae Mysterium*, is “to study and to provide information and training about the principle problems of law and biomedicine pertaining to the promotion and protection of life, especially in the direct relationship they have with Christian morality and the directives of the Church’s Magisterium” (*L’Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 9 March 1994, n. 4). In this way, you strive to make known to people of goodwill that science and technology, when placed at the service of the human person and his or her fundamental rights, contribute to the integral good of the person.

The work that you are carrying out over the course of these days has the theme: “Aging and Disability”. It is an extremely relevant topic, which is close to the Church’s heart. In fact, in our societies we find the tyrannical dominion of an economic logic that excludes and sometimes kills, and of which so many today are victims, beginning with our elderly. “We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised — they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers’” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 53). The socio-demographic situation of the aged clearly reveals to us this exclusion of the elderly, especially when he or she is ill, disabled or vulnerable for any reason. One too often forgets, in fact, that human relationships are always relationships of mutual dependence, which is manifest to different degrees over the course of a person’s life and which becomes most apparent in old age, illness, disability and suffering in general. And this requires that, in interpersonal relationships such as those which exist in a community, we offer the necessary help, in order to seek to respond to the need the person presents at that moment. However, at the basis of discrimination and exclusion there lies an anthropological question: what is man’s worth and what is the basis of his worth? Health is certainly an important value, but it does not determine the value of a person. Furthermore, health in and of itself is no guarantee of happiness: for this may occur even in the presence of poor health. The fullness towards which every human life tends is not in contradiction with a condition of illness and suffering. Therefore, poor health and disability are never a good reason for excluding or, worse, for eliminating a person; and the most serious privation that elderly persons undergo is not the weakening of the body and the disability that may ensue, but abandonment and exclusion, the privation of love.

The family, instead, is the teacher of acceptance and solidarity: it is within the family that education substantially draws upon relationships of solidarity; in the family one learns that the loss of health is not a reason for discriminating against human life; the family teaches us not to fall into individualism and to balance the ‘I’ with the ‘we’.

It is there that “taking care of one another” becomes a foundation of human life and a moral attitude to foster, through the values of commitment and solidarity. The witness of the family is crucial, before the whole of society, in reaffirming the importance of an elderly person as a member of a community, who has his or her own mission to accomplish and who only seemingly receives with nothing to offer. “Whenever we attempt to read the signs of the times it is helpful to listen to young people and the elderly. Both represent a source of hope for every people. The elderly bring with them memory and the wisdom of experience, which warns us not to foolishly repeat our past mistakes” (*ibid.*, n. 108).

A society truly welcomes life when it recognizes that it is also precious in old age, in disability, in serious illness



and even when it is fading; when it teaches that the call to human fulfillment does not exclude suffering; indeed, when it teaches its members to see in the sick and suffering a gift for the entire community, a presence that summons them to solidarity and responsibility. This is the Gospel of life which, through your scientific and professional competence, and sustained by grace, you are called to spread.

Dear friends, I bless the work of the Academy for Life, which is often demanding since it requires that you go against the tide, but which is always extremely valuable since it seeks to join scientific rigour and respect for the human person. I have been able to observe this by becoming more familiar with your work and publications; and I hope that you preserve this same spirit in your ongoing service to the Church and to the whole human family. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady protect you always.

From the Vatican, 19 February 2014