

Palliatieve zorg

**Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI during his visit to hospice Sacro Cuore -
Fondazione Roma**



13 December 2009

Pope Benedict XVI

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I willingly accepted the invitation to pay a visit to the “Hospice Fondazione Roma” and I am very glad to be with you. I address my cordial thoughts to the Vicar, Cardinal Agostino Vallini, to their Excellencies the Auxiliary Bishops and to the priests who are present. I warmly thank Professor Emmanuele Emanuele, President of the “Fondazione Roma”, and Duke Leopoldo Torlonia, President of the “Circolo San Pietro”, for the significant words they have courteously addressed to me. Together with them, I greet those in charge of the “Hospice Fondazione Roma”, its President, Mr Alessandro Falez, the health-care personnel and the nursing and administrative staff, the Sisters and all those who in various capacities work in this praiseworthy institution. I then express my special appreciation to the Volunteers of the “Circolo San Pietro”. I am well acquainted with the zeal and generosity with which they offer help and comfort to the sick and their families. The “Hospice Fondazione Roma” came into being in 1998 with the name “Hospice Sacro Cuore”, at the initiative of the then-General President of the “Circolo San Pietro”, Marquis Marcello Sacchetti, whom I greet with deep and grateful respect. The task of this institution is the care of terminal patients, in order to alleviate their suffering as far as possible and to accompany them lovingly while their illness takes its course. In 11 years, the number of patients in the Hospice has risen from three to more than 30, who are cared for every day by doctors, nurses and volunteers. To them we must add the 90 patients who are nursed at home. All this contributes to making the “Hospice Fondazione Roma” to which, the Alzheimer’s unit has been added over time, as well as an experimental nursing project destined for people affected by Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis a particularly important reality in the panorama of health care in Rome.

Dear friends, we know that certain serious pathologies inevitably give rise to moments of crisis in the sick, to bewilderment and to a serious confrontation with their personal situations. The progress of the medical sciences often offer the necessary instruments for facing this challenge, at least with regard to the physical aspects. Nevertheless, it is not always possible to find a cure for every disease and as a result in hospitals and health-care structures across the world we often encounter the suffering of numerous brothers and sisters with incurable illnesses, who are frequently in a terminal phase. Today the prevalent efficiency-based mentality often tends to marginalize these people, considering them a burden and a problem for society. Those who have a sense of human dignity know instead that they must be respected and supported while they face the difficulties and suffering associated with the condition of their health. To this end, there is increasing recourse today to palliative treatment that can alleviate the pain that illness causes and help the sick live through it with dignity. However, as well as the indispensable clinical treatment, it is necessary to offer the sick practical gestures of love, closeness and Christian solidarity in response to their need for understanding, comfort and constant encouragement. This is what is successfully carried out here, at the “Hospice Fondazione Roma”, which makes the focus of its commitment the treatment and caring acceptance of the sick and their relatives, in harmony



with the teachings of the Church which, down the ages has always shown herself as a loving mother to those who suffer in body and in spirit. As I express my pleasure in the praiseworthy work carried out, I wish to encourage all those who making themselves true icons of the Good Samaritan who had compassion and went to [his neighbour]... and took care of him" (cf. Lk 10: 34) offer daily to the residents and their kin adequate assistance, attentive to the needs of each one.

Dear sick people, dear relatives, I have just met you individually, and I have seen in your eyes the faith and strength that sustain you in difficulty. I have come to offer each one of you a concrete witness of closeness and affection. I assure you of my prayers, and I ask you to seek support and comfort in Jesus, so that you may never lose trust and hope. Your illness is a very painful and unique trial, but in the face of the mystery of God who took on our mortal flesh, it acquires meaning and becomes a gift as well as an opportunity for sanctification. When suffering and discomfort are aggravated, remember that Christ is associating you with his Cross because he wants to say, through you, a word of love to those who have lost the way in life and, locked into their own empty selfishness, are living in sin and far from God. In fact, the condition of your health testifies that true life is not here but with God, where each one will find his joy, if he has humbly placed his footsteps behind those of the truest man: Jesus of Nazareth, Teacher and Lord.

The Season of Advent in which we are immersed speaks to us of the visit of God and invites us to prepare the way for him. In the light of faith we can interpret in illness and suffering a particular experience of Advent, a visit from God who mysteriously comes to set us free from loneliness and the lack of meaning and to transform suffering into a time of encounter with him, a time of hope and of salvation. The Lord comes, he is here beside us! May this Christian certainty also help us understand "tribulation" as a way in which he can come to meet each one and become for him or her the "close God" who liberates and saves. Christmas, for which we are preparing, offers us the possibility of contemplating the Holy Child, the true light that comes to this world in order to manifest "the grace of God, that brings salvation to all men" (Tit 2: 11). To him, with the sentiments of Mary, we all entrust ourselves, our lives and our hopes. Dear brothers and sisters! With these thoughts I invoke upon each one of you the motherly protection of the Mother of Jesus, whom the Christian people in trouble call upon as *Salus Infirmorum*, and I cordially impart to you a special Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of deep spiritual joy and authentic peace in the Lord.