



MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI FOR THE FIFTEENTH WORLD DAY OF THE SICK

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On 11 February 2007, when the Church keeps the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Fifteenth World Day of the Sick will be celebrated in Seoul, Korea. A number of meetings, conferences, pastoral gatherings and liturgical celebrations will take place with representatives of the Church in Korea, health care personnel, the sick and their families. Once again the Church turns her eyes to those who suffer and calls attention to the incurably ill, many of whom are dying from terminal diseases. They are found on every continent, particularly in places where poverty and hardship cause immense misery and grief. Conscious of these sufferings, I will be spiritually present at the World Day of the Sick, united with those meeting to discuss the plight of the incurably ill in our world and encouraging the efforts of Christian communities in their witness to the Lord's tenderness and mercy.

Sickness inevitably brings with it a moment of crisis and sober confrontation with one's own personal situation. Advances in the health sciences often provide the means necessary to meet this challenge, at least with regard to its physical aspects. Human life, however, has intrinsic limitations, and sooner or later it ends in death. This is an experience to which each human being is called, and one for which he or she must be prepared. Despite the advances of science, a cure cannot be found for every illness, and thus, in hospitals, hospices and homes throughout the world we encounter the sufferings of our many brothers and sisters who are incurably and often terminally ill. In addition, many millions of people in our world still experience insanitary living conditions and lack access to much-needed medical resources, often of the most basic kind, with the result that the number of human beings considered "incurable" is greatly increased.

The Church wishes to support the incurably and terminally ill by calling for just social policies which can help to eliminate the causes of many diseases and by urging improved care for the dying and those for whom no medical remedy is available. There is a need to promote policies which create conditions where human beings can bear even incurable illnesses and death in a dignified manner. Here it is necessary to stress once again the need for more palliative care centres which provide integral care, offering the sick the human assistance and spiritual

accompaniment they need. This is a right belonging to every human being, one which we must all be committed to defend.

Here I would like to encourage the efforts of those who work daily to ensure that the incurably and terminally ill, together with their families, receive adequate and loving care. The Church, following the example of the Good Samaritan, has always shown particular concern for the infirm. Through her individual members and institutions, she continues to stand alongside the suffering and to attend the dying, striving to preserve their dignity at these significant moments of human existence. Many such individuals – health care professionals, pastoral agents and volunteers – and institutions throughout the world are tirelessly serving the sick, in hospitals and in palliative care units, on city streets, in housing projects and parishes.

I now turn to you, my dear brothers and sisters suffering from incurable and terminal diseases. I encourage you to contemplate the sufferings of Christ crucified, and, in union with him, to turn to the Father with complete trust that all life, and your lives in particular, are in his hands. Trust that your sufferings, united to those of Christ, will prove fruitful for the needs of the Church and the world. I ask the Lord to strengthen your faith in his love, especially during these trials that you are experiencing. It is my hope that, wherever you are, you will always find the spiritual encouragement and strength needed to nourish your faith and bring you closer to the Father of Life. Through her priests and pastoral workers, the Church wishes to assist you and stand at your side, helping you in your hour of need, and thus making present Christ's own loving mercy towards those who suffer.

In conclusion, I ask ecclesial communities throughout the world, and particularly those dedicated to the service of the infirm, to continue, with the help of Mary, *Salus Infirmorum*, to bear effective witness to the loving concern of God our Father. May the Blessed Virgin, our Mother, comfort those who are ill and sustain all who have devoted their lives, as Good Samaritans, to healing the physical and spiritual wounds of those who suffer. United to each of you in thought and prayer, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of strength and peace in the Lord.

From the Vatican, 8 December 2006

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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