



MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER ON THE OCCASION
OF THE TWENTY-FIRST WORLD DAY OF THE SICK
(11 FEBRUARY 2013)

“Go and do likewise” (Lk 10:37)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. On 11 February 2013, the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Twenty-first World Day of the Sick will be solemnly celebrated at the Marian Shrine of Altötting. This day represents for the sick, for health care workers, for the faithful and for all people of goodwill “a privileged time of prayer, of sharing, of offering one’s sufferings for the good of the Church, and a call for all to recognize in the features of their suffering brothers and sisters the Holy Face of Christ, who, by suffering, dying and rising has brought about the salvation of mankind” (JOHN PAUL II, *Letter for the Institution of the World Day of the Sick*, 13 May 1992, 3). On this occasion I feel especially close to you, dear friends, who in health care centres or at home, are undergoing a time of trial due to illness and suffering. May all of you be sustained by the comforting words of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council: “You are not alone, separated, abandoned or useless. You have been called by Christ and are his living and transparent image” (*Message to the Poor, the Sick and the Suffering*).

2. So as to keep you company on the spiritual pilgrimage that leads us from Lourdes, a place which symbolizes hope and grace, to the Shrine of Altötting, I would like to propose for your reflection the exemplary figure of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk 10:25-37*). The Gospel parable recounted by Saint Luke is part of a series of scenes and events taken from daily life by which Jesus helps us to understand the deep love of God for every human being, especially those afflicted by sickness or pain. With the concluding words of the parable of the Good Samaritan, “Go and do likewise” (*Lk 10:37*), the Lord also indicates the attitude that each of his disciples should have towards others, especially those in need. We need to draw from the infinite love of God, through an intense relationship with him in prayer, the strength to live day by day with concrete concern, like that of the Good Samaritan, for those suffering in body and spirit who ask for our help, whether or not we know them and however poor they may be. This is true, not only for

pastoral or health care workers, but for everyone, even for the sick themselves, who can experience this condition from a perspective of faith: "It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love" (*Spe Salvi*, 37).

3. Various Fathers of the Church saw Jesus himself in the Good Samaritan; and in the man who fell among thieves they saw Adam, our very humanity wounded and disoriented on account of its sins (cf. ORIGEN, *Homily on the Gospel of Luke XXXIV,1-9*; AMBROSE, *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, 71-84; AUGUSTINE, *Sermon 171*). Jesus is the Son of God, the one who makes present the Father's love, a love which is faithful, eternal and without boundaries. But Jesus is also the one who sheds the garment of his divinity, who leaves his divine condition to assume the likeness of men (cf. *Phil 2:6-8*), drawing near to human suffering, even to the point of descending into hell, as we recite in the Creed, in order to bring hope and light. He does not jealously guard his equality with God (cf. *Phil 2:6*) but, filled with compassion, he looks into the abyss of human suffering so as to pour out the oil of consolation and the wine of hope.

4. The *Year of Faith* which we are celebrating is a fitting occasion for intensifying the service of charity in our ecclesial communities, so that each one of us can be a good Samaritan for others, for those close to us. Here I would like to recall the innumerable figures in the history of the Church who helped the sick to appreciate the human and spiritual value of their suffering, so that they might serve as an example and an encouragement. Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, "an expert in the *scientia amoris*" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 42), was able to experience "in deep union with the Passion of Jesus" the illness that brought her "to death through great suffering" (*Address at General Audience*, 6 April 2011). The Venerable Luigi Novarese, who still lives in the memory of many, throughout his ministry realized the special importance of praying for and with the sick and suffering, and he would often accompany them to Marian shrines, especially to the Grotto of Lourdes. Raoul Follereau, moved by love of neighbour, dedicated his life to caring for people afflicted by Hansen's disease, even at the world's farthest reaches, promoting, among other initiatives, World Leprosy Day. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta would always begin her day with an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist and then she would go out into the streets, rosary in hand, to find and serve the Lord in the sick, especially in those "unwanted, unloved, uncared for". Saint Anna Schäffer of Mindelstetten, too, was able to unite in an exemplary way her sufferings to those of Christ: "her sick-bed became her cloister cell and her suffering a missionary service. Strengthened by daily communion, she became an untiring intercessor in prayer and a mirror of God's love for the many who sought her counsel" (*Canonization Homily*, 21 October 2012). In the Gospel the Blessed Virgin Mary stands out as one who follows her suffering Son to the supreme sacrifice on

Golgotha. She does not lose hope in God's victory over evil, pain and death, and she knows how to accept in one embrace of faith and love, the Son of God who was born in the stable of Bethlehem and died on the Cross. Her steadfast trust in the power of God was illuminated by Christ's resurrection, which offers hope to the suffering and renews the certainty of the Lord's closeness and consolation.

5. Lastly, I would like to offer a word of warm gratitude and encouragement to Catholic health care institutions and to civil society, to Dioceses and Christian communities, to religious congregations engaged in the pastoral care of the sick, to health care workers' associations and to volunteers. May all realize ever more fully that "the Church today lives a fundamental aspect of her mission in lovingly and generously accepting every human being, especially those who are weak and sick" (*Christifideles Laici*, 38).

I entrust this Twenty-first World Day of the Sick to the intercession of Our Lady of Graces, venerated at Altötting, that she may always accompany those who suffer in their search for comfort and firm hope. May she assist all who are involved in the apostolate of mercy, so that they may become good Samaritans to their brothers and sisters afflicted by illness and suffering. To all I impart most willingly my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 2 January 2013

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI