



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR HEALTH PASTORAL CARE

Friday, 21 January 2005

*Your Eminence,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I offer you my cordial greeting, with a special thought of gratitude for Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragán, who has expressed your common sentiments.
Your Plenary Assembly is taking place on the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers, established in 1985 with the "Motu Proprio" *Dolentium Hominum*. Consequently, this is a particularly favourable opportunity to thank the Lord for the good achieved by the Pontifical Council at the service of the dissemination of the *Gospel of Christian hope* in the vast world of the suffering and of those who are called to care for them.
2. May this moment also become for you an effective incentive to renew your commitment to putting into practice your programmes "to spread, explain and defend the Church's teachings on the subject of health care, and to encourage their penetration into health-care practices", as the "Motu Proprio" *Dolentium Hominum* says (n. 6). Indeed, it is your Dicastery's task to *guide, sustain* and *encourage* all that is promoted in this field by the Bishops' Conferences and by Catholic Organizations and Institutions for professionals in medicine and in health-care promotion.

In this regard, it is comforting to think of all the pastoral work that the Dicastery is able to carry out with *harmonious and specific animation*, linked to the Bishops' Conferences and Catholic Organizations, "to promote and spread an ever-better ethical-religious formation of Christian health-care workers in the world, keeping in mind the different situations and specific problems which they must face in carrying out their profession... to safeguard essential values and rights

connected with the dignity and the supreme destiny of the human person" (*Dolentium Hominum*, n. 5).

In her pastoral action, the Church is called to face *the most delicate and unavoidable issues* that well up in the human heart in the face of suffering, illness and death. It is from faith in Christ who died and rose that these issues can draw the comfort of the hope that does not disappoint.

Today's world, which often does not possess the light of this hope, suggests solutions of death. Hence, there is the urgent need to promote a new evangelization and a strong witness of active faith in these vast secularized areas.

3. The Pontifical Council, therefore, does well to focus its reflections and programmes on the *sanctification of illness* and the *special role* of the sick in the Church and in the family, by virtue of the living presence of Christ in every suffering person. From this viewpoint, the year dedicated to the Eucharist is an appropriate opportunity for a more intense pastoral commitment in the administration of both Viaticum and the Anointing of the Sick. By fully configuring patients to Christ who died and rose, these sacraments enable sick persons themselves as well as the community of believers to experience the comfort that comes from supernatural hope.

Properly enlightened by the words of the priest and of those who assist him, the sick person can joyfully discover *the particular mission* entrusted to the sick in the Mystical Body of the Church: united with the suffering Christ, each one can cooperate in the salvation of humanity, making the most of his or her prayers with the offering up of one's suffering (cf. Col 1: 24).

4. This must not, however, dispense Church leaders from paying *stimulating and active attention to the structures* where sick people sometimes suffer forms of marginalization and a lack of social support. Church leaders must also extend this attention to the areas of the world where the neediest of the sick, despite the progress of medicine, lack medical drugs and appropriate treatment.

The Church must also devote special care to those areas of the world where *those sick with AIDS* receive no help. The Good Samaritan Foundation was created especially for them; its aim is to contribute to helping the peoples most exposed with the necessary therapeutic support.

The work of evangelization, the formation of consciences and the charitable witness that your Dicastery promotes in the world are a precious contribution, not only to comforting the suffering but also to guiding civil societies towards the demanding goals of the civilization of love.

5. I therefore thank you, dear brothers and sisters, for all the work done in these years, and I urge you to continue it with renewed enthusiasm. You know that I am constantly close to you and

accompany you in your Dicastery's tasks with my prayers and my full confidence in the dedication you devote to your important activities. I encourage you in them, and to comfort you in your work I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, with which I also intend to embrace all those to whom you reach out through your work.

Copyright © Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana