



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
ASSOCIATION OF ITALIAN HOSPITAL OTOLARYNGOLOGISTS (AOOI)  
AND THE ITALIAN FEDERATION OF PEDIATRIC PHYSICIANS (FIMP)**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Saturday, 18 November 2023*

**[Multimedia]**

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*Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!*

I am happy to meet you, as members of the Italian Federation of Paediatric Physicians and the Association of Italian Hospital Otolaryngologists, and to express my appreciation for your daily work. Indeed, in your different specializations, you have chosen to work in the service of people in need of care. This is beautiful!

You paediatricians, in particular, are points of reference for young couples. You help them in their task of accompanying children through their growth. Children are always a gift and a blessing from the Lord: in the Psalms there is that beautiful image of the family gathered around the table with their children “like olive shoots” (Ps 128:3). Italy is unfortunately an ageing country: let us hope that this trend can be reversed, creating favourable conditions for the young to have more confidence and to rediscover the courage and the joy of becoming parents. Perhaps I should not say this, but I will say it: today people would rather have a puppy than a child! Your profession is very, but that of veterinarians is growing! And this is not a good sign.

You, otolaryngologists, take care of some organs that are necessary for our relations and that keep us in contact with others and with the community. In the Gospel, we see Jesus approaching deaf and mute people who lived in loneliness and isolation. And we observe that in healing them he makes a special gesture and speaks special words. I think that these gestures and words can be an inspiration to you, because in them God's compassion and tenderness for us shines

through, especially for those who experience difficulty in relationships.

Together with the many health professionals, you constitute one of the pillars of the country. The memory of the pandemic is still burning: without the dedication, sacrifice and commitment of health workers, many more lives would have been lost. Three years later, the health situation in Italy is going through a new phase of criticality that seems to be becoming structural. There is a constant shortage of personnel, leading to unmanageable workloads and the consequent flight from the health professions. The continuing economic crisis affects the quality of life of patients and doctors: how many early diagnoses are not made? How many people give up on treatment? How many doctors and nurses, disheartened and tired, abandon their profession or prefer to go and work abroad?

These are some of the factors that undermine the exercise of that right to health that is part of the heritage of the social doctrine of the Church and is enshrined in the Italian Constitution as the right of the individual, that is, of everyone - no one excluded -, especially the weakest, and as an interest of the community, because health is a common good. The Italian public health system is founded on the principles of universality, equity, and solidarity, but today these are in danger of not being applied. Please preserve this system, which is a popular system in the sense of service to the people, and do not fall into the perhaps too efficient - some say 'modern' - idea: only pre-paid medicine or paid medicine and then nothing else. No. This system must be looked after, it must be made to grow, because it is a system of service to the people.

Then there are two other opposite and equally dangerous phenomena that are spreading: on the one hand, the pursuit of health at all costs, the utopia of eliminating illness, removing the daily experience of vulnerability and limitation; on the other hand, the abandonment of those who are weaker and more fragile, in some cases with the proposal of death as the only way. But a medicine that renounces care and entrenches itself behind dehumanized and dehumanizing procedures is no longer the art of healing. Instead, the sick person must be approached with the attitude of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk 25-37*), who does not look the other way, but leans over the wounded man and soothes his suffering, without asking questions, without allowing his heart and mind to be closed by prejudices, without thinking of his own benefit. This Gospel parable will help you to always look at the faces of patients, small and large: to give them welcome and hope, to listen to their stories, to support them when the going gets tough. The key-word is *compassion*, which is not pity, no, compassion, which is to suffer with. It is an irreplaceable diagnostic tool! Besides, Jesus is the quintessential doctor, isn't he? There are three features of God that always help us to go forward: closeness, compassion and tenderness. I like to think that all of us healers of health - we, healers of spiritual health, you, of physical health and also psychic and spiritual health in part - must have these three attitudes: closeness, compassion and tenderness. And this helps so much, this builds society. I wish you this: that you are close, compassionate and tender.

The last thing. Those who are called to care for others must not neglect to care for themselves. In

recent years, the resilience of doctors, nurses, health professionals has been put to the test. Interventions are needed to dignify your work and promote the best conditions for it to be carried out in the most effective way. So often you are victims!

I also thank you for your commitment to association: it is important. I encourage young people to take this professional path, which is a demanding way of working while caring for others.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the motherly intercession of the Virgin Mary accompany you. I bless you from my heart, together with your families. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

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