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## Holy Father's Message for the 25th World Day of the Sick

Amazement at what God has accomplished – “The Almighty has done great things for me...” – from a passage from the Gospel according to St. Luke, is the title of the Holy Father's Message for the 25th World Day of the Sick, to be held on 11 February, the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes. The following is the full text of the Message, which was signed on 8 December, feast of the Immaculate Conception.

“Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On 11 February next, the Twenty-fifth World Day of the Sick will be celebrated throughout the Church and in a special way at Lourdes. The theme of this year's celebration is “Amazement at what God has accomplished: ‘The Almighty has done great things for me...’” (Lk 1:49). Instituted by my predecessor St. John Paul II in 1992, and first celebrated at Lourdes on 11 February 1993, this Day is an opportunity to reflect in particular on the needs of the sick and, more generally, of all those who suffer. It is also an occasion for those who generously assist the sick, beginning with family members, health workers and volunteers, to give thanks for their God-given vocation of accompanying our infirm brothers and sisters. This celebration likewise gives the Church renewed spiritual energy for carrying out ever more fully that fundamental part of her mission which includes serving the poor, the infirm, the suffering, the outcast and the marginalized (cf. John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Dolentium Hominum*, 11 February 1985, 1). Surely, the moments of prayer, the Eucharistic liturgies and the celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick, the sharing with the sick and the bioethical and theological-pastoral workshops to be held in Lourdes in those days will make new and significant contributions to that service.

Even now, I am spiritually present at the grotto of Massabielle, before the statue of the Immaculate Virgin, in whom the Almighty has done great things for the redemption of mankind. I express my closeness to all of you, our suffering brothers and sisters, and to your families, as well as my appreciation for all those in different roles of service and in healthcare institutions throughout the world who work with professionalism, responsibility and dedication for your care, treatment and daily well-being. I encourage all of you, the sick, the suffering, physicians, nurses, family members and volunteers, to see in Mary, Health of the Infirm, the sure sign of God's love for every human being and a model of surrender to His will. May you always find in faith, nourished by the Word and by the Sacraments, the strength needed to love God, even in the experience of illness.

Like St. Bernadette, we stand beneath the watchful gaze of Mary. The humble maiden of Lourdes tells us that

the Virgin, whom she called “the Lovely Lady”, looked at her as one person looks at another. Those simple words describe the fullness of a relationship. Bernadette, poor, illiterate and ill, felt that Mary was looking at her as a person. The Lovely Lady spoke to her with great respect and without condescension. This reminds us that every person is, and always remains, a human being, and is to be treated as such. The sick and the those who are disabled, even severely, have their own inalienable dignity and mission in life. They never become simply objects. If at times they appear merely passive, in reality that is never the case.

After her visit to the Grotto, thanks to her prayer, Bernadette turned her frailty into support for others. Thanks to her love, she was able to enrich her neighbours and, above all, to offer her life for the salvation of humanity. The fact that the Lovely Lady asked her to pray for sinners reminds us that the infirm and the suffering desire not only to be healed, but also to live a truly Christian life, even to the point of offering it as authentic missionary disciples of Christ. Mary gave Bernadette the vocation of serving the sick and called her to become a Sister of Charity, a mission that she carried out in so exemplary a way as to become a model for every healthcare worker. Let us ask Mary Immaculate for the grace always to relate to the sick as persons who certainly need assistance, at times even for the simplest of things, but who have a gift of their own to share with others.

The gaze of Mary, Comfort of the Afflicted, brightens the face of the Church in her daily commitment to the suffering and those in need. The precious fruits of this solicitude for the world of suffering and sickness are a reason for gratitude to the Lord Jesus, Who out of obedience to the will of the Father became one of us, even enduring death on the cross for the redemption of humanity. The solidarity shown by Christ, the Son of God born of Mary, is the expression of God’s merciful omnipotence, which is made manifest in our life – above all when that life is frail, pain-filled, humbled, marginalised and suffering – and fills it with the power of hope that can sustain us and enable us to get up again.

This great wealth of humanity and faith must not be dissipated. Instead, it should inspire us to speak openly of our human weaknesses and to address the challenges of present-day healthcare and technology. On this World Day of the Sick, may we find new incentive to work for the growth of a culture of respect for life, health and the environment. May this Day also inspire renewed efforts to defend the integrity and dignity of persons, not least through a correct approach to bioethical issues, the protection of the vulnerable and the protection of the environment.

On this Twenty-fifth World Day of the Sick, I once more offer my prayerful support and encouragement to physicians, nurses, volunteers and all those consecrated men and women committed to serving the sick and those in need. I also embrace the ecclesial and civil institutions working to this end, and the families who take loving care of their sick. I pray that all may be ever joyous signs of the presence of God’s love and imitate the luminous testimony of so many friends of God, including St. John of God and St. Camillus de’ Lellis, the patrons of hospitals and healthcare workers, and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, missionary of God’s love.

Dear brothers and sisters – the sick, healthcare workers and volunteers – I ask you to join me in praying to Mary. May her maternal intercession sustain and accompany our faith, and obtain for us from Christ her Son hope along our journey of healing and of health, a sense of fraternity and responsibility, a commitment to integral human development and the joy of feeling gratitude whenever God amazes us by His fidelity and His mercy.

Mary, our Mother,

in Christ you welcome each of us as a son or daughter.

Sustain the trusting expectation of our hearts,

succour us in our infirmities and sufferings,

and guide us to Christ, your Son and our brother.

Help us to entrust ourselves to the Father Who accomplishes great things.

With the assurance of a constant remembrance in my prayers, I cordially impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.”

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