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Audience with the “Gruppo Villa Maria care and research” Foundation

This morning the Holy Father Francis received in audience the doctors, nurses, administrative staff and managers of the *Gruppo Villa Maria care and research*.

The following is the Pope’s greeting to those present:

Greeting of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I address my cordial welcome to you, representatives of the *Gruppo Villa Maria*: doctors, nurses, administrative staff and managers. I thank the President for his words. I have listened to the presentation of the aims and intentions that inspire the life of your Group, which has been active for forty years in the health sector and at the service of people’s health. I congratulate you on the dynamism that has led you to extend your activity, in addition to Italy, to other countries, always at the service of human life marked by disease. I encourage you to persevere with dedication in the works you have undertaken, and I hope that your structures, places of suffering but also of hope and human and spiritual experience, may be increasingly marked by solidarity and care for the ailing person.

Technological evolution and changes of a social, economic and political nature have changed the fabric on which the life of hospitals and health care structures rests. Hence the need for a new culture, especially in the technical and moral preparation of health workers at all levels.

From this perspective, what the Villa Maria Group has done so far to meet the needs of patients and their families, who are sometimes forced to migrate to specialized centres far from their own home, is important. The commitment to broadening the range of action with the acquisition or creation of new facilities and the expansion of infrastructure, shows the will to ensure the necessary equipment and comfort for the sick and their recovery.

It is to be hoped that the places of care will increasingly become houses of welcome and comfort, where the sick person will find friendship, understanding, kindness and charity. In short, where they find humanity. The sick person is not a number: he or she is a person who needs humanity. In this regard, it is necessary to inspire collaboration among all, to meet the needs of the sick with a spirit of service and an attitude of generosity and sensitivity. This is not easy, because the sick person is sick, and loses patience and so is often “out of sorts”. It is not easy, but it must be done. In order to achieve these objectives, it is necessary not to allow oneself to be absorbed by “systems” that aim only at the economic-financial component, but rather to implement a style of closeness to the person, in order to be able to assist him with human warmth in the face of the anxieties that can overcome him in the most critical moments of the illness. In this way it contributes concretely to humanizing medicine, and the hospital and healthcare environment. I said a word, proximity: we must not forget it. Proximity too – let us say – is the method that God used to save us. Already to the Jewish people he said: “Tell me, what people have their gods so close, as close as I am to you?”. The God of proximity became close in Jesus Christ: one of us. Proximity is the key to humanity and Christianity.

Those who recognize themselves in the Christian faith are called to serve in the spirit of the words of Jesus: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (*Mt 25: 40*). Here lies the evangelical foundation of service to others. Thus the sick and suffering become, for those who have faith, living signs of the presence of Christ, the Son of God, Who came to cure and heal, taking upon himself our frailty, our weakness. Taking care of the brother who suffers means, in this sense, making room for the Lord. From the places of healing and pain also comes a message for the life of all; a great lesson that no other professorship can impart. The man who suffers, in fact, understands more the need and value of the divine gift of redemption and faith, and also helps those close to him to appreciate and seek this gift.

And it is precisely to the sick and the patients in your structures that I would like to express my closeness, my closeness, which I beg you to pass on to them. I join them in their expectation of healing, spiritually sharing in their trials and hoping that it will soon be over, so that everyone can return home to their family as soon as possible. For them I invoke from the Lord the gifts of patience and trust, together with great strength of endurance, to be always docile to God’s will, trusting in His paternal and provident goodness.

To all of you, dear friends, I reiterate my appreciation for your service to the sick, your service of humanity. Thank you, thank you for this! I entrust your work to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary *Salus infirmorum*, and I bless you all from my heart. Please do not forget to pray for me. I need this too.
