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Audience with fishermen from various Italian fleets and participants in the Conference “Universality and Sustainability of National Health Services in Europe”

This morning, in the Paul VI Hall, Pope Francis received in audience a group of fishermen from various Italian fleets and participants in the Conference “*Universality and Sustainability of National Health Services in Europe*”.

The following is the address delivered by the Holy Father to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning, welcome!

I greet the brother Bishops present, the leaders of the *Apostleship of the Sea* in Italy, the representatives of fishermen, professional associations and trade unions; and I greet the participants at the International Conference *Universality and Sustainability of National Health Services in Europe*, held yesterday at the Lateran University.

I address you first, dear brothers and sisters of the maritime world, just a few days after World Fisheries Day. Your activity is very ancient; it is linked to the beginnings of the Church, entrusted by Christ to Peter, who was a fisherman in Galilee (cf. *Lk 5:1-11*). Nevertheless, it is experiencing many difficulties today. I would therefore like to suggest some reflections on the value of what you do and the mission that this value entails.

In the Gospel, fishermen embody important attitudes. For example, perseverance in toil: the disciples are described as “distressed in rowing” (*Mk 6:48*), due to the headwind, or still weary from failure when they return to land empty-handed, saying: “We have worked hard all night and have caught nothing” (*Lk 5:5*). And that is exactly how it is: your work is hard, requiring sacrifice and tenacity, faced with both the usual challenges and urgent new problems, such as the difficult generational change, the costs that continue to grow, stifling bureaucracy, and unfair competition from large multinationals. However, this does not discourage you; on the

contrary, it fuels another of your characteristics: unity. One does not go out to sea alone. To cast your nets, you have to work together, as a crew, or better still as a community in which, despite the diversity of roles, the success of each person's work depends on the contribution of all. In this way, fishing becomes a school of life, to the point that Jesus uses it as a symbol to indicate the vocation of the apostles: "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men" (*Mk 1:17*). Dear women and men, you of the sea, may your Patron, Saint Francis of Paola, help you from Heaven.

And now I turn to you, brothers and sisters from the world of healthcare. The theme you have addressed in your conference poses the question of the health condition in which the national services and systems in Europe find themselves. Yours is also a mission that costs effort and demands that you know how to work together, as a team. However, I would like to invite you to focus on two further aspects of your experience.

The first aspect is that of caring about those you care for. Indeed, it is important not to forget that you, health workers, are people just as in need of support as the brothers and sisters you care for. The fatigue of exhausting shifts, the worries you carry in your hearts and the pain you gather from your patients require comfort, they demand healing. That is why I urge you not to neglect yourselves, but rather to be caretakers for one another; and to all I say that it is important to recognize your generosity and reciprocate it by ensuring respect, esteem and help.

The second aspect I would like to highlight is compassion for the last. Indeed if, as we have said, no-one is so self-sufficient as to have no need for care, it follows that no-one can be marginalized to the extent of not being able to receive care. The healthcare systems and services from which you come have behind them, in this regard, a great history of sensitivity, especially towards those who are not reached by the "system", towards the "rejected". Let us think of the work of so many religious saints who for centuries founded hospices for the sick and for pilgrims; or figures such as Saint John of God, Saint Joseph Moscati, Saint Teresa of Calcutta: they were all true "clinicians", that is, men and women beside the bed of those who suffer, as the etymology of the term tells us. The invitation I make to you, then, is to inspire healthcare systems from within, so that no-one is abandoned (cf. *Message for the 32rd World Day of the Sick*, 10 January 2024). The Gospel, which teaches us not to hide our talents but to make them bear fruit for the good of all (cf. *Mt 25:14-30*), instructs us also to have, in doing so, a preferential way for those who, after falling, lie abandoned on the roadside (cf. *Lk 10:30-37*). The Latin language has forged, in this regard, a beautiful word: consolation, *con-solatio*, which indicates being united in solitude, which is then no longer solitude (cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, 39). Here is the way: to be united in solitude so that no one is alone in sorrow. And that is where closeness comes in, always; closeness...

Dear friends, I see many families among you. I would therefore like to conclude by reminding you all of the importance of the family, the cell of society. It is fundamental for both your professions. First of all, for the sacrifices that your relatives share with you, adapting to the demanding schedules and pace of your work, which is not only a profession, but an "art", and hence involves the entire person and his or her environment. Then for the support your families give you in your fatigue and often in the activity itself. Cherish your family relationships, please: they are "medicine", both for the healthy and the sick. Isolation and individualism, in fact, open the door to the loss of hope, and this causes the soul, and often the body, to sicken.

So, good work to you all, and may Our Lady accompany you. I bless you from my heart. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!
