



The Holy See

11th WORLD DAY OF THE SICK

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO SICK PERSONS ON THE MEMORIAL
OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES**

Tuesday, 11 February 2003

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*1. I meet you with great joy, as I do every year, at the end of this celebration dedicated especially to you, dear sick people. My first greeting is for you, the primary participants of today's *World Day of the Sick*. I greet all who are close to you, relatives, friends and volunteers, and the members of the Italian National Union for Transporting the Sick to Shrines (UNITALSI). I greet the Cardinal Vicar, and the bishops and priests present, the men and women religious and those who in various ways place themselves at the service of the sick and the suffering. I also greet the members of the "Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi" (the Roman Work for Pilgrimages to Lourdes), and those who take part in the national theological-pastoral convention held in Rome on the theme: "*the Pilgrimage, Path of Peace*". This reminds me of the Holy Land. I express the hope and the prayer that as soon as possible those places sanctified by Christ's presence may recover a stable peace that will allow the return of the groups of pilgrims.2. Today we celebrate the 11th World Day of the Sick, placed *under the protection of the Immaculate Virgin Mary*. In a little while, the hymns and prayers will take us in spirit to Lourdes, a place blessed by God and dear to you. At the same time, we join the faithful who have thronged the National Shrine in *Washington*, also dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin, where this year the principal celebrations of the World Day of the Sick take place. As we look to the revered image of Our Lady of Lourdes, our eyes are drawn to the *Rosary* that hangs from her joined hands. The Virgin in prayer seems to want to *renew her invitation* to young Bernadette to *recite the Rosary confidently*. With great joy we accept this exhortation on the World Day of the Sick, an important date in the Year of the Rosary! Today Lourdes, Rome and Washington form a providential "crossroads" in a concerted invocation to the God of life that he instil confidence, comfort and hope in those who are suffering all over the world.3. Dear sick people, *the Rosary offers the Christian response to the problem of suffering*, drawing it from the Easter mystery of Christ. Those who pray follow, with Mary, the whole itinerary of life and faith, an itinerary that has as an integral part human suffering, that in Christ becomes divine - human suffering, the saving Passion. In the sorrowful mysteries we contemplate Christ who takes upon himself, we can say, all the "sickness" of the human person and of the human race. As the Lamb of God, he not only bears the burden of their consequences, but of their profound cause, that is, not just *the evils*, but *the radical evil of sin*. His struggle is not superficial but radical; his cure is not palliative but definitive.

The power through which Christ overcame the dominion of evil and healed the human person is his *confident*

abandonment in an attitude of filial submission to the Father's will. This same attitude operates in us, thanks to the Holy Spirit, when, in the experience of sickness, we travel with Mary the way of the sorrowful mysteries.⁴ Dear Brothers and Sisters, the heart of the Virgin Mary that was pierced by the sword teaches us to "learn Christ", to be conformed to him and to pray to him (cf. Apostolic Letter *On the Most Holy Rosary*, nn. 13-16). She guides us to proclaim his love (cf. *ibid.*, n. 17); those who carry the cross with Jesus also offer an eloquent witness to those who are unable to believe or to hope. In this year, troubled by such great anxiety for the future of humanity, I wished the prayer of the Rosary to have as specific intentions the cause of *peace* and of the *family* (*ibid.*, nn. 6; 40-42). Dear sick brothers and sisters, you are "on the front line" to intercede for these two great designs.

May your life, marked by trial, instil in everyone that hope and serenity which can only be experienced in meeting Christ. Let us entrust this hope and all our special intentions to Mary Immaculate, Health of the Sick. To you who are here, and to your loved ones, I affectionately impart my Apostolic Blessing. *The Holy Father gave his blessing from his study window to the candlelight procession in St Peter's Square* I warmly thank you for this candlelight procession. Let us remember all the sick across the world. Let us join Our Lady of Lourdes and the sick people who are in Lourdes. Let us also join those in Washington, where this year the World Day of the Sick is being celebrated.