



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE XXIX INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
SPONSORED BY THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS
ON THE THEME "THE PERSON WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS : ANIMATING HOPE"**

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 22 November 2014*

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Thank you for your welcome!

I am happy to welcome you at the end of your 29th International Conference and I thank you for wanting to realize such a commendable and worthy initiative, dedicated to the complex issue of autism.

I warmly greet all of you who have come to take part in this meeting, which focused on prayer and testimony, together with people who are affected by autism spectrum disorders, their families and specialized associations.

Such disorders constitute a fragility that affects numerous children and, consequently, their families. They represent an area that directly appeals to the governments and institutions, without of course forgetting the responsibility of Christian communities.

Everyone should be committed to promoting acceptance, encounter and solidarity through concrete support and by encouraging renewed hope, thereby contributing to overcome the isolation and, in many cases, the stigma to which people with autism spectrum disorders are also subjected, and often their families too.

This must not be an anonymous or impersonal accompaniment, but one of listening to the profound needs that arise from the depths of a pathology which, all too often, is difficult to

diagnose, but — especially for the family — must be accepted without shame or withdrawal into solitude. It is a cross.

In the realm of assistance to people affected by autism spectrum disorders, it would be beneficial to create a regional network of support and services which are comprehensive and accessible. In addition to parents, these should also involve grandparents, friends, therapists, educators and pastoral workers. These figures can help families overcome the feelings, which can sometimes arise, of inadequacy, helplessness and frustration.

For this reason, I thank the families, parish groups and various associations represented here today and from whom we heard these moving and meaningful testimonies, for the work they carry out every day. I extend to all of them my personal gratitude and that of the whole Church.

Additionally, I would like to encourage the challenging work of the academics and researchers, so that they may discover, as soon as possible, treatments and instruments of support and aid in order to heal and, above all, to prevent the onset of these disorders. All of this while paying due attention to patients' rights, their needs and their potential, always safeguarding the dignity of every person.

Dear brothers and sisters, I entrust you all to the protection of the Virgin Mary, and I thank you sincerely for your prayers. Now, all together, let us pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary for all health care workers, for the sick, and then receive the blessing. [Hail Mary... Blessing...]

Let us also now pray together for the soul of Cardinal Angelini, the Founder of this Council for health care, who began this service of the Church and whom the Lord called to himself last night. [Our Father... Hail Mary... *Gloria Patri...Requiem aeternam...*].