



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO RIO DE JANEIRO, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
2nd WORLD MEETING FOR FAMILIES
(OCTOBER 2-6, 1997)

***LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE SICK AT THE NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE***

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The programme of my Pastoral Visit to Rio de Janeiro makes me pass by your hospital. Since lack of time prevents me from prolonging my journey to visit you, I would at least like to put in an appearance among you by sending my greeting in writing. I feel heartfelt sympathy and compassion for each of you, the sick, the doctors and the other staff employed at the National Cancer Institute.

I want to assure you that the families who are taking part in this Second World Meeting, and all the faithful who show you solidarity, affectionately embrace the entire human family touched by suffering. Today they particularly embrace you, who are experiencing the intense challenge of pain, which only the mysterious plan of divine Providence can help you understand.

The Church must always take to heart her duty to be close to and share in this painful mystery, which unites so many men and women in every age to the condition of Jesus Christ during his Passion. When illness knocks on a human being's door, it always invites him to recognize in his own life the reflection of Christ, the "Man of Sorrows". At the sight of her Lord ("I was sick and you visited me", says Jesus), the Church redoubles her care and motherly presence beside the sick, so that divine love may touch them more deeply, bearing fruit in sentiments of filial trust and abandonment to the hands of the heavenly Father for the world's salvation.

In God's saving plan, suffering "more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the Redemption" (*Salvifici doloris*, n. 27). Just as the Lord Jesus Christ saved his people by loving them "to the end" (Jn 13:1), "unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8), so he continues in a way to invite all his disciples to suffer for God's kingdom. When united to Christ's redeeming Passion, human suffering becomes a means of spiritual maturity and a magnificent school of Gospel love.

I invite you who are ill always to look with faith and hope to the Redeemer of men. Divine mercy will know how to hear your prayers and supplications for healing from the ills that afflict you, if it is pleasing to the Father and benefits you. He will always dry your tears, if you are able to look at his Cross and anticipate in hope the reward for this suffering. Trust in him. He will not abandon you!

I would also like to express to all of you who work in this hospital — physicians, nurses, pharmacists, volunteer friends, attendants, priests and religious — the Church's gratitude for the example you offer and for the loving way you serve society. "This service is a way of sanctification like illness itself. Down the centuries it has been a manifestation of the love of Christ, who is precisely the source of holiness" (*Address*, n. 6, 15 June 1994; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 22 June 1994, p. 11). God calls you to be outstanding defenders of life, at every moment, until its natural end. May science, which the Creator has placed in your hands, always be a tool of absolute respect for human life and its sacredness, as was already recognized by the ancient and ever timely *Hippocratic oath*.

"*Together with Mary, Mother of Christ, who stood beneath the Cross* (cf. Jn 19:25) we pause beside all the crosses of contemporary man" (*Salvifici doloris*, n. 31), as I wish to do today near this hospital, to declare openly that the Church needs the sick and their sacrifice to the Lord, in order to obtain abundant graces for all mankind (cf. *Address*, *ibid.*). With these wishes, I invoke from the Almighty gifts of peace and spiritual consolation for all the sick and for the authorities and employees of the National Cancer Institute, and I cordially impart to you the favour of my Apostolic Blessing, which I extend to all your relatives and friends.

From the Vatican, 30 September 1997.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II