



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER  
POPE JOHN PAUL II  
FOR THE IV WORLD DAY OF THE SICK**

1. "Do not worry about this illness or about any other misfortune. Am I, your Mother, not here at your side? Are you not protected by my shadow? Am I not your safety?". The humble *Indio*, Juan Diego of Cuautilan, heard these words on the lips of the Blessed Virgin, in December 1531, at the foot of Tepeyac Hill, today called Guadalupe, after asking for the healing of a relative.

As the Church of the beloved Mexican nation commemorates the first centenary of the crowning of the venerated image of Our Lady of Guadalupe (1895-1995), it is particularly significant that the famous shrine of Mexico City was chosen as the place for the most solemn celebration of the forthcoming World Day of the Sick on 11 February 1996.

This Day is at the centre of the ante-preparatory phase (1994-1996) of the third Christian millennium, which is "meant to revive in the Christian people an awareness of the value and meaning of the Jubilee of the Year 2000 in human history" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 31). The Church looks with confidence at the events of our age and among "the signs of hope present in the last part of this century", she recognizes "scientific, technological and especially medical progress in the service of human life" (*ibid.*, n. 46). It is as a sign of this hope, illumined by the presence of Mary "Health of the Sick", that in preparation for the Fourth World Day of the Sick I address those who bear in body and spirit the signs of human suffering, as well as all who, in offering them fraternal service, seek to follow the Redeemer completely. Indeed, "*Just as Christ ... was sent by the Father ?to bring good news to the poor... to heal the contrite of heart' (Lk 4:18), ?to seek and to save what was lost' (Lk 19:10), so the Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery, and she recognizes in those who are poor and who suffer, the image of her poor and suffering founder' (Lumen gentium, n. 8).*

***Mother of Jesus is our model and guide***

2. Dear brothers and sisters who experience suffering in a particular way, you are called to a special mission in the new evangelization and to find your inspiration in Mary, Mother of love and human pain. You are supported in this difficult witness by health-care workers, family members and the volunteers who accompany you on your daily path of suffering. As I recalled in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*: "The Blessed Virgin will be as it were 'indirectly' present in the whole preparatory phase" of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, "as the perfect model of love towards both God and neighbour", just as we hear her maternal voice say once again: "Do whatever Christ tells you" (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, nn. 43, 54).

In receiving this invitation from the heart of the *Salus infirmorum*, you will be able to impress a unique mark on the new evangelization by proclaiming the Gospel of life, mysteriously mediated through the witness given by the Gospel of suffering (cf. *Evangelium vitae*, n. 1; *Salvifici doloris*, n. 3). "An organized health-care apostolate is part of the evangelizing task" (Address to the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Latin America, n. 8, 23 June 1995; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 26 July 1995, p. 9).

3. The Mother of Jesus is the model and guide of this effective proclamation, since she "places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. She puts herself 'in the middle', that is to say, she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother. She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she 'has the right' to do so. Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary 'intercedes' for mankind. And that is not all. As a mother she also wishes the messianic power of her Son to be manifested, that salvific power of his which is meant to help man in his misfortunes, to free him from the evil which in various forms and degrees weighs heavily upon his life" (*Redemptoris Mater*, n. 21).

By this mission the *Salus infirmorum* is continually present in the Church's life, she who continues today, as she did at the dawn of the Church (Acts 1:14), to be "the model of that motherly love with which all who join in the Church's apostolic mission for the regeneration of mankind should be animated" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 65).

The celebration of the most solemn moment of the World Day of the Sick at the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe thematically relates the first evangelization of the New World to the new evangelization. Among the peoples of Latin America, in fact, "the Gospel has been proclaimed with the Virgin Mary presented as its loftiest fulfilment.... And this identity is glowingly reflected on the mestizo countenance of Mary of Guadalupe, who appeared at the start of the evangelization process" (*Pueblo Document*, 1979, nn. 282, 446). Thus for five centuries in the New World, the Blessed Virgin has been revered as the "first evangelizer of Latin America", as the "star of evangelization" (Letter to Men and Women Religious of Latin America on the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the New World, n. 31).

4. In carrying out her missionary task, the Church, supported and comforted by the intercession of Mary most holy, has written significant pages of concern for the sick and suffering in Latin America. Today as well, the health-care apostolate continues to have an important place in the Church's apostolic activity: she is responsible for many places of assistance and care, and she works among the very poor with appreciated attention in the health-care field, thanks to the generous efforts of many brothers in the Episcopate, priests, religious and many lay faithful, who have developed a marked sensitivity to anyone in pain.

***You have a leading role of Gospel renewal***

If we turn our gaze from Latin America to take in the whole world, we see many proofs of the Church's maternal concern for the sick. Today as well, perhaps especially today, the cry of throngs tried by suffering rises from humanity. Entire peoples are tortured by the cruelty of war. The victims of conflicts now in progress are primarily the weakest: mothers, children, the elderly. How many human beings, exhausted by hunger and disease, cannot count on even the most basic forms of assistance. And where these are fortunately provided, how many of the sick are gripped by fear and despair because they cannot give constructive meaning to their own suffering in the light of faith.

The praiseworthy and even heroic efforts of so many health-care workers and the increasing contribution of volunteer personnel are not enough to meet the concrete needs. I ask the Lord to raise up an even greater number of generous people, who will give the suffering the comfort not only of physical assistance but also of spiritual support, by opening before them the consoling horizons of faith.

5. Dear friends who are sick and you, the family members and health-care workers who share their difficult path, keep in mind that you have a leading role of Gospel renewal on the spiritual journey towards the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Against the disturbing panorama of old and new forms of attacks on life, which mark the history of our times, you are like the crowd that tried to touch the Lord "because power went out from him which cured all" (Lk 6:19). And it was precisely in the presence of this multitude of people that Jesus gave the "sermon on the mount", calling blessed those who weep (cf. Lk 6:21). *Suffering and being at the side of the suffering*: whoever lives these two situations in faith comes into particular contact with the sufferings of Christ and is allowed to share "a very special particle of the infinite treasure of the world's Redemption" (*Salvifici doloris*, n. 27).

6. Dear brothers and sisters who are enduring trials, generously offer your pain in communion with the suffering Christ and with Mary, his most gentle Mother. And you who work daily at the side of the suffering, make your service a valuable contribution to evangelization. Feel that you are a living part of the Church, since in you the Christian community has been called to embrace the Cross of Christ so as to give the world the reason for its Gospel hope (cf. 1 Pt 3:15). "We ask all

you who suffer to support us. We ask precisely you who are weak to become a source of strength for the Church and humanity. In the terrible battle between the forces of good and evil, revealed to our eyes by our modern world, may your suffering in union with the Cross of Christ be victorious" (*Salvifici doloris*, n. 31).

7. My appeal is also addressed to you, Pastors of ecclesial communities, and to you who are responsible for the health-care apostolate, that you make suitable preparations for celebrating the next World Day of the Sick with programmes for drawing the attention of the People of God and civil society to the immense, complex problems of health and health care.

***Without justice there is no peace***

And you, health-care workers — doctors, pharmacists, nurses, chaplains, men and women religious, administrators and volunteers — and especially you women, pioneers in the medical and spiritual care of the sick, you must all promote communion among the ill, among their family members and in the ecclesial community.

Be at the side of the sick and their families, so that in their suffering they may never feel rejected. The experience of pain will thus become for each of them a school of generous dedication.

8. I willingly extend this appeal to civil officials at every level, so that they may welcome the Church's attention and commitment to the world of suffering as an opportunity for dialogue, meeting and collaboration in order to build a civilization, which on the basis of concern for the suffering, may continually advance on the path of justice, freedom, love and peace. Without justice the world will never know peace; without peace suffering can only increase without measure.

Upon all the suffering and upon those who expend themselves in their service, I invoke the maternal support of Mary. May the Mother of Jesus, venerated for centuries in the famous shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, hear the cry of this great suffering, dry the tears of those in pain and be at the side of all the world's sick. Dear friends who are ill, may the Holy Virgin present to her Son the offering of your sufferings, in which Christ's face on the Cross is reflected.

With this wish goes the assurance of my fervent prayers, as I cordially impart to all my Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 11 October 1995, the liturgical memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.*