



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO GREAT BRITAIN

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
AT THE CEREMONY
OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

*Southwark's Cathedral
Friday, 28 May 1982*

My brothers and sisters,

1. Praised be Jesus Christ! Praised be Jesus Christ who invites us to share in his life through our Baptism. Praised be Jesus Christ who calls us *to unite our sufferings to his* so that we may be one with him in giving glory to the Father in heaven.

Today I greet you in the name of Jesus. I thank all of you for the welcome you have given me. I want you to know how I have looked forward to this meeting with you, especially with those of you who are sick, disabled or infirm. I myself have had a share in suffering and I have known the physical weakness that comes with injury and sickness.

2. It is precisely because I have experienced suffering that I am able to affirm with ever greater conviction what Saint Paul says in the second reading: "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Rom. 8, 38-39*).

Dear friends, there is no force or power that can block God's love for you. Sickness and suffering seem to contradict all that is worthy, all that is desired by man. *And yet no disease, no injury, no infirmity can ever deprive you of your dignity as children of God, as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.*

3. By his dying on the Cross, Christ shows us how to make sense of our suffering. In his Passion we find the inspiration and strength of turn away from any temptation to resentment and grow through pain into new life.

Suffering is an invitation to be more like the Son in doing the Father's will. It offers us an opportunity to imitate Christ who died to redeem mankind from sin. Thus the Father has disposed that suffering can enrich the individual and the whole Church.

4. We acknowledge that the Anointing of the Sick is for the benefit of the whole person. We find this point demonstrated in the liturgical texts of the sacramental celebration: "Make this oil a remedy for all who are anointed with it; heal them in body, in soul and in spirit, and deliver them from every affliction."

The anointing is therefore a source of strength for both the soul and the body. The prayer of the Church asks that sin and the remnants of sin be taken away (Cfr. DENZ.-SCHÖN., 1969). It also implores a restoration of health, but always in order that *bodily healing may bring greater union with God* through the increase of grace.

In her teaching on this sacrament, the Church passes on the truth contained in our first reading from Saint James: "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (*Jac. 5, 14-15*).

5. This sacrament should be approached in a spirit of great confidence, like the leper in the Gospel that has just been proclaimed. Even the desperateness of the man's condition did not stop him from approaching Jesus with trust. *We too must believe in Christ's healing love and reaffirm that nothing will separate us from that love.* Surely Jesus wishes to say: "I will; be clean" (*Matth. 8, 3*); be healed; be strong; be saved.

My dear brothers and sisters, as you live the Passion of Christ you strengthen the Church by the witness of your faith. You proclaim by your patience, your endurance and your joy the mystery of Christ's redeeming power. *You will find the crucified Lord in the midst of your sickness and suffering.*

6. As Veronica ministered to Christ on his way to Calvary, so Christians have accepted the care of those in pain and sorrow as privileged opportunities to minister to Christ himself. I commend and bless all those who work for the sick in hospitals, residential homes and centres of care for the dying. I would like to say to you doctors, nurses, chaplains and all other hospital staff: Yours is a noble vocation. *Remember it is Christ to whom you minister in the sufferings of your brothers and sisters.*

7. *I support with all my heart those who recognize and defend the law of God which governs human life. We must never forget that every person, from the moment of conception to the last breath, is a unique child of God and has a right to life. This right should be defended by the attentive care of the medical and nursing professions and by the protection of the law. Every human life is willed by our heavenly Father and is a part of his loving plan.*

No State has the right to contradict moral values which are rooted in the nature of man himself. These values are the precious heritage of civilization. If society begins to deny the worth of any individual or to subordinate the human person to pragmatic or utilitarian considerations, it begins to destroy the defences that safeguard its own fundamental values.

8. Today I make an urgent plea to this nation. Do not neglect your sick and elderly. Do not turn away from the handicapped and the dying. Do not push them to the margins of society. For, if you do, you will fail to understand that they represent an important truth. The sick, the elderly, the handicapped and the dying teach us that weakness is a creative part of human living, and that suffering can be embraced with no loss of dignity. Without the presence of these people in your midst you might be tempted to think of health, strength and power as the only important values to be pursued in life. *But the wisdom of Christ and the power of Christ are to be seen in the weakness of those who share his sufferings.*

Let us keep the sick and the handicapped at the centre of our lives. Let us treasure them and recognize with gratitude the debt we owe them. We begin by imagining that we are giving to them; we end by realizing that they have enriched us.

May God bless and comfort all who suffer. And may Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world and healer of the sick, make his light shine through human weakness as a beacon for us and for all mankind. Amen.

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, as we speak of suffering, affliction and death, we cannot forget those who have suffered and died during the armed conflict in the South Atlantic. Let us now remember in our prayers the victims of both sides. May the Father of mercies and of all consolation be close to the wounded and to all the families touched by tragedy.

May he give eternal rest to those who have died in Christ and to those who mourn in Christian hope and let us pray that negotiations may pave the way to a just and lasting peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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