



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR HEALTH PASTORAL CARE**

Thursday, 2 May 2002

*Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. I am particularly pleased to have this meeting during the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care that offers you the occasion to examine and draft a new plan of work for the next five years.

I greet the President of the Council, Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán and thank him for his cordial words expressing your sentiments of esteem. I greet the Cardinals and my Brothers in the Episcopate, the members, consultants and experts of the Council, the Secretary and the Undersecretary as well as the other officials, priests, religious and lay people. I thank you all for the precious help you give me in such a critical area of our Gospel witness.

2. The great amount of work that your Council has accomplished in the 17 years since its foundation confirms how necessary it is that among the offices of the Holy See there should be one that is specifically designated to manifest *"the Church's concern for the sick, assisting those who serve the sick and the suffering, so that the apostolate of mercy on which they rely may respond ever better to the new needs"* (Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, art. 152).

Let us thank the Lord for the wide range and variety of pastoral activities carried out in the field of health care around the world with the stimulus and support of your Council. I encourage you to continue in that direction with zeal and confidence, so that you can offer to the people of our time the Gospel of hope and mercy.

3. Taking a cue from the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, at your meeting you plan to

reflect on the best way to *reveal the suffering and glorious face of Christ enlightening* the world of health care, suffering and illness with the Gospel, *sanctifying* the sick and health-care workers and *promoting* the coordination of pastoral health care of sick persons in the Church.

During this Easter season, we contemplate Jesus' *glorious face* after meditating, especially in Holy Week, on his *sorrowful face*. It is in these two dimensions that we find the core of the Gospel and of the Church's pastoral ministry.

I wrote in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* that Jesus "at the very moment when he identifies with our sin, 'abandoned' by the Father, he 'abandons' himself into the hands of the Father". In this way he lives "his profound unity with the Father, by its very nature a source of joy and happiness, and an agony that goes all the way to his final cry of abandonment" (n. 26). In the suffering face of Good Friday is hidden the life of God, offered for the salvation of the world. Through the Crucified One, our contemplation must be open to the Risen One. Comforted by this experience the Church is ever ready to continue her journey to proclaim Christ to the world.

4. Your plenary assembly focuses on programmes that aim at enlightening the entire world of health care with the light of the *sorrowful and glorious face of Christ*. In this perspective, it is crucial to reflect more in depth on topics that are bound up with health care, sickness and suffering, guided by a concept of the human person and his destiny that is faithful to the saving plan of God.

The new frontiers opened up by progress in the sciences of life and the applications deriving from them, have put enormous power and responsibility in man's hands. If the *culture of death* prevails, if in the field of medicine and biomedical research those doing the research let themselves be conditioned by selfish and Promethean ambitions, it is inevitable that human dignity and life itself will be dangerously threatened. However, if work in the important health care sector is shaped by the *culture of life*, under the guidance of right conscience, the human being will find an effective response to his deepest longings.

The Pontifical Council will not fail to contribute to a new evangelization of suffering, that Christ takes on and transfigures in the triumph of the Resurrection. In this regard, the life of prayer and recourse to the Sacraments are essential, for without them the spiritual journey of the sick and of those who take care of them becomes difficult.

5. Today, the sector of health care and suffering face new and complex problems that demand a generous commitment from everyone. The dwindling number of women religious involved in this field, the difficult ministry of hospital chaplains, the problem of organizing a satisfactory and effective health care apostolate at the level of the local Churches and the approach to health-care personnel who are not always in accord with the Christian vision, form a plethora of complex and problematical topics that you have certainly noticed.

Faithful to its mission, your Council will continue to show the pastoral concern of the Church for sick people, it will help all who care for the suffering, and particularly those who work in hospitals, always to respect the life and dignity of the human being. To achieve such objectives it will be useful to collaborate generously with the international organizations concerned with health care.

May the Lord, the Good Samaritan of suffering humanity, help you always. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, sustain you in your service and be your model of acceptance and love. As I assure you of my prayers, I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.