



HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JUBILEE OF THE SICK AND HEALTH-CARE WORKERS

Friday, 11 February 2000

1. *"The day shall dawn upon us from on high"* (Lk 1: 78). With these words Zechariah foretold the Messiah's imminent coming into the world.

In the Gospel passage just proclaimed, we relived the episode of the Visitation: Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, Jesus' visit to John, God's visit to man.

Dear brothers and sisters who are sick and have gathered in this Square today to celebrate your Jubilee, the event we are observing is also the *expression of a special visit from God*. With this in mind, I welcome you and greet you warmly. You are in the heart of Peter's Successor, who shares your every concern and anxiety: welcome! Today I deeply share this celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 with you and with the health-care workers, family members and volunteers who are at your side with loving devotion.

I greet Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, President of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers, with his staff, who have organized this Jubilee meeting. I greet the Cardinals and Bishops present, as well as the prelates and priests who have accompanied groups of the sick to today's celebration. I greet the Health Minister of the Italian Government and the other authorities here. Lastly, a grateful greeting goes to the many professionals and volunteers who have made themselves available to serve the sick during these days.

2. *"The day shall dawn upon us from on high"*. Yes! Today God has visited us. In every situation he is with us. But *the Jubilee is the experience of a very special visit from him*. In becoming man, the Son of God came to visit every person, and for each one he has become "the Door": the Door of life, the Door of salvation. Man must pass through this Door if he wants to find salvation. Each person is invited to cross this threshold.

Today you especially are invited to cross it, dear sick and suffering people gathered in St Peter's Square from Rome, from Italy and from the whole world. The invitation is extended to you who are connected by a special television link-up and are united with us in prayer from the shrine of Czestochowa in Poland: I offer you my cordial greeting and gladly extend it to everyone who is following our celebration on radio and television in Italy and abroad.

Dear brothers and sisters, some of you have been confined to a bed of pain for years: I pray God that today's meeting will bring you extraordinary physical and spiritual relief! I would like this moving celebration to offer everyone, the healthy and the sick, an opportunity to meditate on the saving value of suffering.

3. Pain and sickness are part of the human mystery on earth. It is, of course, right to fight illness, because health is a gift of God. But it is also important to be able to discern God's plan when suffering knocks at our door. *The "key" to this discernment is found in the Cross of Christ*.

The incarnate Word embraced our weakness, taking it upon himself in the mystery of the Cross. Since then all suffering has *a possibility of meaning*, which makes it remarkably valuable. For 2,000 years, since the day of the Passion, the Cross shines as the supreme manifestation of God's love for us. Those who are able to accept it in their lives experience how pain illumined by faith becomes a source of hope and salvation.

Dear sick people, called at this moment to carry an even heavier cross, may Christ be the Door for you. May Christ also be the Door for you, dear friends who accompany them and care for them.

Like the Good Samaritan, every believer must offer love to those who live in suffering. It is not right to "pass by" those who are tried by sickness. Instead, it is necessary to stop, to bend down to their illness and to share it generously, thus alleviating their burdens and difficulties.

4. St James writes: "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" (Jas 5: 14-15). We will relive the Apostle's exhortation in a particular way when, in a little while, some of you dear sick people will receive the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. By restoring spiritual and physical vigour, this sacrament shows clearly that for the suffering Christ is *the Door that leads to life*.

Dear sick people, this is the crowning moment of your Jubilee! In crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, you are joining all those in every part of the world who have already crossed it and those who will be crossing it during the Jubilee Year. May passing through the Holy Door be a sign of your spiritual entry into the mystery of Christ, the crucified and risen Redeemer, who for love bore "our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Is 53: 4).

5. The Church enters the new millennium, clasping to her heart the Gospel of suffering, which is a message of redemption and salvation. Dear sick brothers and sisters, you are exceptional witnesses to this Gospel. The third millennium awaits this witness from suffering Christians. It also awaits it from you who work in the health-care apostolate and in various ways carry out a mission to the sick that is highly significant and most appreciated.

May the Immaculate Virgin, who came to visit us at Lourdes, as we recall with joy and gratitude today, bend down to each of you. In the cave of Massabielle, she entrusted to St Bernadette a message which brings us to the heart of the Gospel: to conversion and penance, to prayer and trustful abandonment into God's hands.

With Mary, the Virgin of the Visitation, let us too praise the Lord with the *Magnificat*, the hymn of hope for all the poor, the sick and the suffering of this world, who exult with joy because they know that God is beside them as their Saviour.

So, together with the Blessed Virgin, let us proclaim: "My soul magnifies the Lord" and turn our steps towards the true Jubilee Door: *Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and for ever!*

At the end of the liturgy the Holy Father greeted the pilgrims in various languages.

I warmly greet the English-speaking pilgrims taking part in this special Jubilee Celebration for the Sick and for Health-Care Workers. Commending all of you to the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians and Comfort of the Afflicted, I invoke upon you strength and peace in her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I extend a very cordial greeting to the sick and to those accompanying them. You have come to celebrate especially close to Christ. In this suffering may Christ always be your strength, he who redeemed the world through his passion and death on the Cross. Dear suffering brothers and sisters, we are indebted to you. The Church is indebted to you, as is the Pope! Pray for us.