

Pope Speaks

Gospel Reveals Meaning of Suffering

(Excerpts from the address of Pope John Paul II on World Day of the Sick, Feb. 11, 2004. Original in Italian)

The famous Marian Shrine of Lourdes, located in the Pyrenees Mountains, continues to attract crowds of pilgrims from all over the world, among whom are so many sick people.... 2004 marks the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which took place on December 8, 1854. Four years later, in 1858 in Lourdes, the Virgin Mary, appearing in the Grotto of Massabielle to Bernadette Soubirous, introduced herself as "the Immaculate Conception."

We now go in spiritual pilgrimage to the feet of the Immaculate Conception of Lourdes, to participate in the prayer of the clergy and faithful, and especially of the sick gathered there. [The World Day of the Sick is a strong call to rediscover the important presence of those who suffer in the Christian community, and to increasingly value their precious contribution.](#) From a simply human point of view, pain and illness might appear as an absurd reality: However, when we allow ourselves to be enlightened by the light of the Gospel, we succeed in appreciating its profound salvific meaning.

[From the paradox of the Cross,... springs the answer to our most worrying questions. Christ suffers for us. He takes upon himself the sufferings of everyone and redeems them. Christ suffers with us, enabling us to share our pain with him. United to the suffering of Christ, human suffering becomes a means of salvation.](#)

I now turn to all those who are feeling the weight of suffering in body and in spirit. To each of them I renew the expression of my affection and of my spiritual closeness. At the same time, I would like to remind you that human existence is always a gift of God, even when it is marked by physical sufferings of all kinds; a "gift" to be valued by the Church and by the world.

Certainly, whoever suffers must never be left alone. In this connection, I am happy to address a word of profound appreciation to those who, with simplicity and a spirit of service, are by the side of the sick, seeking to relieve their sufferings and, insofar as possible, to free them of illness thanks to the progress of medicine. I am thinking especially of health agents, doctors, nurses, scientists and researchers, as well as hospital chaplains and volunteers. [It is a great act of love to take care of those who suffer!](#)

"Sub tuum praesidium ...," we prayed at the beginning of our meeting. "We seek refuge under your protection," Immaculate Virgin of Lourdes, who are for us the perfect model of creation according to the original plan of God. To you we entrust the sick, the elderly, persons who are alone: relieve the pain, dry the tears, and obtain for each one the necessary strength to accomplish the divine will.

Be the support of all those who alleviate the pains of brothers every day. And help us all to grow in knowledge of Christ, who with his death and resurrection has defeated the power of evil and death.