

Think of Jesus as a doctor, pope invites health care professionals

Pope Francis offered an insightful look into Jesus' ministry in his address June 22 to members of the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations. He first lauded the health care professionals for their decision to make a consecration to the Sacred Heart and said he would pray that

“it may be fruitful for every one of you.”

Here are excerpts from his address:

The first Christian communities often presented the Lord Jesus as a “doctor,” emphasizing the constant attention, full of compassion, that He had for those who suffered from every type of illness. His mission consisted first of all of being close to the sick or those affected by disability, especially those who were despised or marginalized as a result. In this way Jesus broke the damning judgment that often labelled the sick person as a sinner; with this compassionate closeness, He expressed the infinite love of God the Father for His neediest children.

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Care for the sick appears, therefore, as one of the constitutive dimensions of Christ's mission; and for this reason, it has remained thus in that of the Church. In the Gospels, a strong link is evident between Christ's preaching and the gestures of healing that He performs for those who are “ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed” (Mt 4: 24).

The way in which Jesus cares for the sick and the suffering is also important. He often touches these people and lets Himself be touched by them, even in the cases in which this would be prohibited. ...

For Jesus, to cure means to draw close to the person, even if at times there are some who would prevent Him from doing so, as in the case of the blind man Bartimaeus, in Jericho. Jesus has him called over and asks him, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Mk 10: 51). It may seem surprising that the “doctor” asks the suffering person what he expects of him. But this sheds light on the value of the word and of dialogue in the healing relationship.

Curing, for Jesus, means entering into dialogue to enable the emergence of the desire of the human being and the gentle power of God's love, working in

His Son. Because to cure means to initiate a journey: a journey of relief, of consolation, of reconciliation and of healing. ... He never heals just a part, but all the person, fully. At times starting from the body, at times from the heart – that is, forgiving his sins (cf. Mk 2: 5), but always to heal the totality.

Finally, Jesus' care coincides with raising up and sending on his way the person whom he has approached and healed. There are many sick people who, after being healed by Christ, become His disciples and followers.

Therefore, Jesus draws close, cares for, heals, reconciles, calls and sends on the way: as we see, his relationship with people oppressed by sickness and infirmity is for him a personal one, rich, not mechanical, not at a distance.

And it is to this school of Jesus, the doctor and brother of the suffering, that you are called as doctors who believe in Him, members of His Church. ...

You are called to encourage, to console, to raise up, to give hope. One cannot care for and be cured without hope; in this we are all in need of and grateful to God, Who gives us hope. But also grateful to those who work in medical research.

In the last hundred years, there has been immense progress. There are new therapies and numerous treatments in the experimental stages. All these cures were unthinkable in past generations. We can and must alleviate suffering and educate each person to become more responsible for his or her own health and the health of neighbours and relatives. We must also remember that caring means respecting the gift of life from the beginning to the end. We are not its owners: life is entrusted to us, and doctors are its servants.

Your mission is at the same time a witness of humanity, a privileged way of making it seen and heard that God, our Father, takes care of every single person, without distinction. To do this, He wishes also to make use of our knowledge, our hands and our heart, to cure and heal every human being, because He wishes to give life and love to each person.

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This demands of you competence, patience, spiritual strength and fraternal solidarity. The style of a Catholic doctor unites professionalism with the capacity for collaboration and ethical rigor. And all this benefits both the patients and the environment in which you work. Very often – we know – the quality of a department is based not so much on the wealth of the equipment it has, but rather the level of professionalism and humanity of the head of

department and the team of doctors. We see this every day, from so many simple people who go to hospital: “I would like to go to this doctor, to that doctor – Why? – Because I feel their closeness, their dedication.”

By continually renewing yourselves and drawing from the wellsprings of the Word of God and the Sacraments, you can carry out your mission well, and the Spirit will give you the gift of discernment to face delicate and complex situations, and to say the right words in the right way and to keep the correct silence at the right moment.

Dear brothers and sisters, I know that you already do so, but I urge you to pray for those you care for and for the colleagues who work with you. And do not forget to pray for me too. Thank you!