



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO

MEETING WITH THE SICK, THE MEDICAL, PARAMEDICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF OF THE HEALTH-CARE STRUCTURE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Monumental entrance of the Home for the Relief of Suffering
Sunday, 21 June 2009*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Dear Sick People,*

On my Visit to San Giovanni Rotondo, I could not omit a stop at the Home for the Relief of Suffering, conceived of and desired by St Pio of Pietrelcina as a "place of prayer and science where the human race united in the Crucified Christ becomes one flock with one Shepherd". For this very reason he wished to entrust it to the material and, above all, spiritual support of the Prayer Groups, who have here the centre of their mission of service to the Church. Padre Pio intended that in this well-equipped hospital one could experience first-hand that the commitment of science to treating the sick must never be separated from filial trust in God, who is infinitely kind and merciful. When he inaugurated the Home on 5 May 1956 he described it as a "creature of Providence" and spoke of this institution as "a seed planted on earth by God, which he will warm with the rays of his love".

Here I am among you, therefore, to thank God for the good that you have been doing in this "Home for the Relief of Suffering" for more than 50 years, faithful to the instructions of a humble Capuchin Friar with results recognized at both the scientific and medical levels. Unfortunately it is not possible for me, much as I would like to, to visit every ward and greet the patients one by one, together with those who nurse them. But I do wish to extend to each one the patients, doctors, relatives, health-care workers and pastoral workers a word of paternal comfort and

encouragement to continue in this evangelical work together which aims to relieve peoples' suffering, making the most of every resource for the human and spiritual good of the sick and their relatives.

With these sentiments, I cordially greet you all, starting with you, brothers and sisters who are tried through illness. Next, I greet the doctors, the nurses and the health-care and administrative staff. I greet you, venerable Capuchin Fathers, who as chaplains are continuing the apostolate of your holy Confrère. I greet the Prelates, first of all Archbishop Domenico Umberto D'Ambrosio, the former Pastor of this Diocese who is now called to guide the archdiocesan community of Lecce. I am grateful to him for the words he has kindly addressed to me on your behalf. I then greet the Director General of the Hospital, Dr Domenico Crupi, and the representatives of the sick, and I am grateful for the kind words they have just addressed to me, enabling me to be better acquainted with what is being achieved here and with the spirit in which you do it. Every time one enters a place of healing, one thinks naturally of the mystery of illness and pain, to the hope of healing and the inestimable value of good health, of which one becomes aware only when it has been lost. In hospitals one sees first-hand the preciousness of our existence but also its fragility. Following the example of Jesus who travelled throughout Galilee "healing every disease and every infirmity among the people" (Mt 4: 23), the Church, from her origins moved by the Holy Spirit, has considered it one of her duties and privileges to be at the side of those who suffer cultivating a preferential attention to the sick.

Illness, which is manifested in so many forms and strikes in different ways, gives rise to disturbing questions: why do we suffer? Can the experience of pain be considered positive? Who can free us from suffering and death? These are existential questions that more often than not remain humanly unanswerable, since suffering constitutes an enigma that is inscrutable to human reason. Suffering is part of the very mystery of the human person. I emphasized this in the Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, noting that: it "stems partly from our finitude, and partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history, and continues to grow unabated today". And I added that: "certainly we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering: ... but to banish it from the world altogether is not in our power. This is simply because... none of us is capable of eliminating the power of evil,... which,... is a constant source of suffering" (cf. n. 36).

God alone can eliminate the power of evil. Precisely because Jesus Christ came into the world to reveal to us the divine plan of our salvation, faith helps us to penetrate the meaning of all that is human, hence also of suffering. Thus an intimate relationship exists between the Cross of Jesus the symbol of supreme pain and the price of our true freedom and our pain, which is transformed and sublimated when it is lived in the awareness of God's closeness and solidarity. Padre Pio sensed this profound truth and, on the first anniversary of the inauguration of this Institution, he said that in it "the suffering person must experience God's love through the wise acceptance of his sufferings in serene meditation on his own destiny" (*Discourse*, 5 May 1957). He noted further that in the Home for the Relief of Suffering "the patients, doctors and priests shall be reservoirs of love"

and that "the more abundant love is in oneself, the better communicated it will be to others" (*ibid.*).

To be "reservoirs of love": this, dear brothers and sisters, is the mission of which, this evening, our Saint reminds you who in various capacities form the great family of this Home for the Relief of Suffering. May the Lord help you to realize the project initiated by Padre Pio with the contribution of all: doctors and scientific researchers, health-care workers and various administrative personnel, volunteers and benefactors, Capuchin Friars and other Priests. We must not forget the Prayer Groups who "alongside the Home for the Relief of Suffering are in the front line of this citadel of charity, nurseries of faith and hearts of love" (Padre Pio, *Discourse*, 5 May 1966). I invoke upon each and every one the intercession of Padre Pio and the motherly protection of Mary, Health of the Sick. I thank you again for your welcome and as I assure you of my prayers for each one of you, I warmly Bless you all.

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