



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

ANGELUS

Sunday, 8 February 2004

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. The *World Day of the Sick* will be celebrated next Wednesday, 11 February, Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes. The principal events will take place precisely in *Lourdes*, where Mary Most Holy appeared to St Bernadette Soubirous, presenting herself as the "Immaculate Conception". Furthermore, this year is the 150th anniversary of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, proclaimed by my venerable Predecessor Bl. Pius IX, whose feast we celebrated yesterday.
 2. The close *connection between Our Lady of Lourdes and the world of suffering and illness* is well known. The sick have always been the chief persons at the Shrine which came into being at the Grotto of Massabielle, and over the years Lourdes has become an authentic *stronghold of life and hope*. How could it be otherwise? The Immaculate Conception of Mary is, in fact, the first fruit of the Redemption brought about by Christ and the pledge of his victory over evil. The spring of water bubbling from the ground from which the Virgin asked Bernadette to drink is reminiscent of the power of Christ's Spirit who heals human beings completely and gives them eternal life.
 3. May Our Lady watch over those who will be taking part in the forthcoming events scheduled at Lourdes: the meetings on *pastoral health care in European countries* and on the special relationship between *Mary Immaculate and the sick*. Let us entrust to the Blessed Virgin the *solemn Eucharistic Celebration* at which my Special Envoy, Cardinal Lozano Barragán, President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care, will be presiding.
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After leading the recitation of the Angelus, the Holy Father said:

I greet the workers from the steel mills in Terni who have come on pilgrimage by foot to draw attention to the employment crisis in that great industrial complex. I cannot forget that it was precisely there that I made my first Pastoral Visit to an Italian factory, on 19 March 1981. Dear workers, as I said at the time, I appreciate your indomitable will to "*defend your work and its dignity*" (*Address to the Workers of Terni*, 19 March 1981, n. 1; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [*ORE*], 30 March 1981, p. 5). I am very close to you in the current difficulties and hope that a just solution can be found to them for you and for your families.

A happy Sunday to you all!

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