



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

World Day of the Sick

Wednesday 11 February 1998

Mary is attentive to needs of every person

1. Today, 11 February, a day dedicated to the memory of Our Lady of Lourdes, we are celebrating *World Day of the Sick* for the sixth time. This year it takes place in the Shrine of Loreto, at the Holy House, where sick people and volunteer workers, faithful and pilgrims from Italy and from other nations have gathered for this special occasion. I would like to address my affectionate thoughts directly to them, linked with us by radio and television. I first greet my representative at the celebration, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State; Archbishop Javier Lozano Barragán, President of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health-Care Workers; and all who have promoted and organized today's event. I greet Archbishop Angelo Comastri, Pontifical Delegate for the Shrine of Loreto, and the prelates who have wished to attend the prayer meeting. I greet the health-care workers and volunteers, especially the members of UNITALSI.

However, my words are addressed with deep affection particularly to the sick. They are truly in the limelight on this Day, which echoes deeply and vividly in my soul. My most cordial greetings to them!

2. *Loreto and the sick!* How well these words go together! The renowned Marian shrine immediately recalls the mystery of the *Incarnation*, in which the action of the *Spirit* was fundamental. Indeed, 1998, the second year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, is dedicated precisely to the Holy Spirit.

I would like to make a spiritual pilgrimage to the feet of the Our Lady of Loreto, together with you who have gathered here today in this Paul VI Auditorium for the customary annual meeting of 11

February. In spirit, let us join the sick in Loreto to pray in the Holy House, which calls to mind God's wonderful condescension by which the Word became flesh and dwelt among men.

In the evocative atmosphere of this sacred place, we receive the light and strength of the Spirit, which can transform man's heart into a *dwelling-place of hope*. In Mary's house, there is room for all her children. In fact, where God dwells, every person can find acceptance, comfort and peace, especially in times of trial. With Mary, "Health of the Sick", there is support for the hesitant, light for the doubting and relief for those burdened by suffering and illness.

Loreto is a house of solidarity and hope, where one can almost feel Mary's maternal concern. Comforted by the assurance of her motherly protection, we are more encouraged to share the suffering of our brothers and sisters, tried in mind and body, to pour on their wounds, after the Good Samaritan's example, the oil of consolation and the wine of hope (cf. *Roman Missal*, Italian edition, Common Preface VIII).

Likewise at the wedding feast at Cana, the Blessed Virgin is attentive to the needs of every man and woman and is ready to intercede with her Son for all. That is why it is very significant that the World Days of the Sick, year after year, take place in Marian shrines.

3. Dear sick people, today is your Day. I am thinking of those of you who are gathered next to the Holy House, of those who are here in this auditorium, and all the sick who have met at the feet of the Immaculate Virgin near the grotto in Lourdes or at other Marian shrines throughout the world. I am thinking of you, still more numerous, in hospitals, in your homes and in the rooms which are the shrines of your patience and daily prayer. A special place is reserved for you in the ecclesial community. The condition of sickness and the desire to recover your health make you privileged witnesses of faith and hope.

I entrust to the intercession of Mary your longing for healing and I urge you always to illumine and elevate this longing with the theological virtue of hope, Christ's gift. Mary will help you give new meaning to suffering, making it a way of salvation, an occasion of evangelization and redemption. Thus your experience of pain and loneliness, modeled on that of Christ and enlivened by the Holy Spirit, will proclaim the victorious power of the Resurrection.

May Mary obtain for you the gift of trust and may she sustain you on your earthly pilgrimage. Trust is more necessary than ever today, because the experience of modern life is more complex and problematic.

And you, O Blessed Virgin of Loreto, watch over the paths of us all. Guide us to the heavenly homeland where, with you, we will contemplate the glory of your Son, Jesus, for ever.

My affectionate Blessing to all!

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I am happy to greet the students and teachers of the Oslo Handelsgymnasium and the Sotra Vidaregåande Skule from Norway, as well as the students of the Junshin University of Kagoshima in Japan. I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially the various groups from the United States. Upon you and your families I cordially invoke the blessings of almighty God.