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25th World Day of the Sick

On February 11, the 25th World Day of the Sick will be celebrated by the Church throughout the world and in a special way at Lourdes. Here is the homily Pope Francis gave at the Jubilee for the Sick last June about the meaning of suffering in Christian life.

02/07/2017

Jubilee for the Sick and Persons with Disabilities

Homily of his Holiness Pope Francis

Saint Peter's Square,

Sunday, June 12, 2016

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (*Gal 2:19*). In these words, the Apostle Paul powerfully expresses the mystery of the Christian life, which can be summed up in the *paschal dynamic* of death and resurrection received at baptism. Indeed, through immersion in water, each of us, as it were, dies and is buried with Christ (cf. *Rom 6:3-4*), and reemerging, shows forth new life in the Holy Spirit. This rebirth embraces every aspect of our lives: even sickness, suffering and death are taken up *in* Christ and in him find their ultimate meaning. Today, on the Jubilee day devoted to the sick and bearers of disabilities,

this word of life has a special resonance for our assembly.

Each of us, sooner or later, is called to face – at times painfully – frailty and illness, both our own and those of others. How many different faces do these common yet dramatically human experiences take! Yet all of them directly raise the pressing question of the meaning of life. Our hearts may quietly yield to cynicism, as if the only solution were simply to put up with these experiences, trusting only in our own strength. Or we may put complete trust in science, thinking that surely somewhere in the world there is a medicine capable of curing the illness. Sadly, however, this is not always the case, and, even if the medicine did exist, it would be accessible to very few people.

Human nature, wounded by sin, is marked by *limitations*. We are

familiar with the objections raised, especially nowadays, to a life characterized by serious physical limitations. It is thought that sick or disabled persons cannot be happy, since they cannot live the lifestyle held up by the culture of pleasure and entertainment. In an age when care for one's body has become an obsession and a big business, anything imperfect has to be hidden away, since it threatens the happiness and serenity of the privileged few and endangers the dominant model. Such persons should best be kept apart, in some "enclosure" – even a gilded one – or in "islands" of pietism or social welfare, so that they do not hold back the pace of a false well-being. In some cases, we are even told that it is better to eliminate them as soon as possible, because they become an unacceptable economic burden in time of crisis. Yet what an illusion it is when people today shut their eyes

in the face of sickness and disability! They fail to understand the real meaning of life, which also has to do with accepting suffering and limitations. The world does not become better because only apparently “perfect” people live there – I say “perfect” rather than “false” – but when human solidarity, mutual acceptance and respect increase. How true are the words of the Apostle: “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (*1 Cor 1:27*)!

This Sunday’s Gospel (*Lk 7:36-8:3*) presents us with a specific situation of weakness. The woman caught in sin is judged and rejected, yet Jesus accepts and defends her: “She has shown great love” (7:47). This is the conclusion of Jesus, who is attentive to her suffering and her plea. This tenderness is a sign of the love that God shows to those who suffer and are cast aside. Suffering need not

only be physical; one of today's most frequent pathologies is also spiritual. It is a suffering of the heart; it causes sadness for lack of love. It is the pathology of sadness. When we experience disappointment or betrayal in important relationships, we come to realize how vulnerable and defenceless we are. The temptation to become self-absorbed grows stronger, and we risk losing life's greatest opportunity: *to love in spite of everything!*

The happiness that everyone desires, for that matter, can be expressed in any number of ways and attained only if we are capable of loving. This is the way. It is always a matter of love; there is no other path. The true challenge is that of who loves the most. How many disabled and suffering persons open their hearts to life again as soon as they realize they are loved! How much love can well up in a heart simply with a

smile! The therapy of smiling. Then our frailness itself can become a source of consolation and support in our solitude. Jesus, in his passion, loved us to the end (cf. *Jn* 13:1); on the cross he revealed the love that bestows itself without limits. Can we reproach God for our infirmities and sufferings when we realize how much suffering shows on the face of his crucified Son? His physical pain was accompanied by mockery, condescension and scorn, yet he responds with a mercy that accepts and forgives everything: “by his wounds we are healed” (*Is* 53:5; *1 Pet* 2:24). Jesus is the physician who heals with the medicine of love, for he takes upon himself our suffering and redeems it. We know that God can understand our infirmities, because he himself has personally experienced them (cf. *Heb* 4:15).

The way we experience illness and disability is an index of the love we

are ready to offer. The way we face suffering and limitation is the measure of our freedom to give meaning to life's experiences, even when they strike us as meaningless and unmerited. Let us not be disturbed, then, by these tribulations (cf. *1 Th* 3:3). We know that in weakness we can become strong (cf. *2 Cor* 12:10) and receive the grace to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for his body, the Church (cf. *Col* 1:24). For that body, in the image of the risen Lord's own, keeps its wounds, the mark of a hard struggle, but they are wounds transfigured for ever by love.

*Link to Pope Francis' Message for
World Day of the Sick 2017*

en/article/illness-is-an-index-of-the-love-
we-are-ready-to-offer/ (04/27/2025)