



MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
FOR THE 24th WORLD DAY OF THE SICK 2016
(11 FEBRUARY 2016)

*Entrusting Oneself to the Merciful Jesus like Mary:
“Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5)*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The twenty-fourth World Day of the Sick offers me an opportunity to draw particularly close to you, dear friends who are ill, and to those who care for you.

This year, since the Day of the Sick will be solemnly celebrated in the Holy Land, I wish to propose a meditation on the Gospel account of the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2: 1-11), where Jesus performed his first miracle through the intervention of his Mother. The theme chosen - *Entrusting Oneself to the Merciful Jesus like Mary: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5)* is quite fitting in light of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. The main Eucharistic celebration of the Day will take place on 11 February 2016, the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, in Nazareth itself, where “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:14). In Nazareth, Jesus began his salvific mission, applying to himself the words of the Prophet Isaiah, as we are told by the Evangelist Luke: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he

has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (*Lk* 4:18-19).

Illness, above all grave illness, always places human existence in crisis and brings with it questions that dig deep. Our first response may at times be one of rebellion: Why has this happened to me? We can feel desperate, thinking that all is lost, that things no longer have meaning...

In these situations, faith in God is on the one hand tested, yet at the same time can reveal all of its positive resources. Not because faith makes illness, pain, or the questions which they raise, disappear, but because it offers a key by which we can discover the deepest meaning of what we are experiencing; a key that helps us to see how illness can be the way to draw nearer to Jesus who walks at our side, weighed down by the Cross. And this key is given to us by Mary, our Mother, who has known this way at first hand.

At the wedding feast of Cana, Mary is the thoughtful woman who sees a serious problem for the spouses: the wine, the symbol of the joy of the feast, has run out. Mary recognizes the difficulty, in some way makes it her own, and acts swiftly and discreetly. She does not simply look on, much less spend time in finding fault, but rather, she turns to Jesus and presents him with the concrete problem: "They have no wine" (*Jn* 2:3). And when Jesus tells her that it is not yet the time for him to reveal himself (cf. v. 4), she says to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you" (v. 5). Jesus then performs the miracle, turning water into wine, a wine that immediately appears to be the best of the whole celebration. What teaching can we draw from this mystery of the wedding feast of Cana for the World Day of the Sick?

The wedding feast of Cana is an image of the Church: at the centre there is Jesus who in his mercy performs a sign; around him are the disciples, the first fruits of the new community; and beside Jesus and the disciples is Mary, the provident and

prayerful Mother. Mary partakes of the joy of ordinary people and helps it to increase; she intercedes with her Son on behalf of the spouses and all the invited guests. Nor does Jesus refuse the request of his Mother. How much hope there is in that event for all of us! We have a Mother with benevolent and watchful eyes, like her Son; a heart that is maternal and full of mercy, like him; hands that want to help, like the hands of Jesus who broke bread for those who were hungry, touched the sick and healed them. All this fills us with trust and opens our hearts to the grace and mercy of Christ. Mary's intercession makes us experience the consolation for which the apostle Paul blesses God: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. For as Christ's sufferings overflow to us, so through Christ does our encouragement also overflow" (2 Cor 1:3-5). Mary is the "comforted" Mother who comforts her children.

At Cana the distinctive features of Jesus and his mission are clearly seen: he comes to the help of those in difficulty and need. Indeed, in the course of his messianic ministry he would heal many people of illnesses, infirmities and evil spirits, give sight to the blind, make the lame walk, restore health and dignity to lepers, raise the dead, and proclaim the good news to the poor (cf. Lk 7:21-22). Mary's request at the wedding feast, suggested by the Holy Spirit to her maternal heart, clearly shows not only Jesus' messianic power but also his mercy.

In Mary's concern we see reflected the tenderness of God. This same tenderness is present in the lives of all those persons who attend the sick and understand their needs, even the most imperceptible ones, because they look upon them with eyes full of love. How many times has a mother at the bedside of her sick child, or a child caring for an elderly parent, or a grandchild concerned for a grandparent, placed his or her prayer in the hands of Our Lady! For our loved ones who suffer

because of illness we ask first for their health. Jesus himself showed the presence of the Kingdom of God specifically through his healings: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” (*Mt* 11:4-5). But love animated by faith makes us ask for them something greater than physical health: we ask for peace, a serenity in life that comes from the heart and is God’s gift, the fruit of the Holy Spirit, a gift which the Father never denies to those who ask him for it with trust.

In the scene of Cana, in addition to Jesus and his Mother, there are the “servants”, whom she tells: “Do whatever he tells you” (*Jn* 2:5). Naturally, the miracle takes place as the work of Christ; however, he wants to employ human assistance in performing this miracle. He could have made the wine appear directly in the jars. But he wants to rely upon human cooperation, and so he asks the servants to fill them with water. How wonderful and pleasing to God it is to be servants of others! This more than anything else makes us like Jesus, who “did not come to be served but to serve” (*Mk* 10:45). These unnamed people in the Gospel teach us a great deal. Not only do they obey, but they obey generously: they fill the jars to the brim (cf. *Jn* 2:7). They trust the Mother and carry out immediately and well what they are asked to do, without complaining, without second thoughts.

On this World Day of the Sick let us ask Jesus in his mercy, through the intercession of Mary, his Mother and ours, to grant to all of us this same readiness to be serve those in need, and, in particular, our infirm brothers and sisters. At times this service can be tiring and burdensome, yet we are certain that the Lord will surely turn our human efforts into something divine. We too can be hands, arms and hearts which help God to perform his miracles, so often hidden. We too, whether healthy or sick, can offer up our toil and sufferings like the water which filled the jars at the wedding feast of Cana and was turned into the finest wine. By quietly helping those who suffer, as in illness itself, we take our daily cross upon our

shoulders and follow the Master (cf. *Lk* 9:23). Even though the experience of suffering will always remain a mystery, Jesus helps us to reveal its meaning.

If we can learn to obey the words of Mary, who says: “Do whatever he tells you”, Jesus will always change the water of our lives into precious wine. Thus this World Day of the Sick, solemnly celebrated in the Holy Land, will help fulfil the hope which I expressed in the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy: ‘I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with [Judaism and Islam] and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination’ (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 23). Every hospital and nursing home can be a visible sign and setting in which to promote the culture of encounter and peace, where the experience of illness and suffering, along with professional and fraternal assistance, helps to overcome every limitation and division.

For this we are set an example by the two Religious Sisters who were canonized last May: Saint Marie-Alphonsine Danil Ghattas and Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified Baouardy, both daughters of the Holy Land. The first was a witness to meekness and unity, who bore clear witness to the importance of being responsible for one another other, living in service to one another. The second, a humble and illiterate woman, was docile to the Holy Spirit and became an instrument of encounter with the Muslim world.

To all those who assist the sick and the suffering I express my confident hope that they will draw inspiration from Mary, the Mother of Mercy. “May the sweetness of her countenance watch over us in this Holy Year, so that all of us may rediscover the joy of God’s tenderness” (*ibid.*, 24), allow it to dwell in our hearts and express it in our actions! Let us entrust to the Virgin Mary our trials and tribulations, together

with our joys and consolations. Let us beg her to turn her eyes of mercy towards us, especially in times of pain, and make us worthy of beholding, today and always, the merciful face of her Son Jesus!

With this prayer for all of you, I send my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 15 September 2015

Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows

FRANCIS