



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO THE DOCTORS, NURSES AND HEALTHCARE WORKERS
FROM THE LOMBARDY REGION***

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 20 June 2020*

[Multimedia]

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Welcome!*

I thank the President of the Lombardy Region for his words. I cordially greet the Archbishop of Milan, the Bishops of Bergamo, Brescia, Cremona, Crema and Lodi, and the other authorities present. I greet the doctors, nurses, healthcare and civil protection workers and the Alpine troopers. I greet the priests and consecrated people. You have come as representatives of Lombardy, one of the Italian regions most impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, along with Piedmont, Emilia Romagna and Veneto, particularly Vo' Euganeo, represented here by the Bishop of Padua. Today I symbolically embrace these regions as well. And I greet the representatives of Rome's Spallanzani Hospital, a medical unit that has done a great deal in battling the virus.

Over the course of these troubled months, various organizations of Italian society have worked hard to confront the health emergency with generosity and commitment. I am thinking of national and regional institutions, of municipalities; I am thinking of dioceses and of parish and religious communities; of so many volunteer associations. We have felt more deeply than ever an appreciation for doctors, nurses and all healthcare workers on the front lines in providing an arduous and at times heroic service. They have been visible signs of humanity that warm the heart. Many of them became sick and sadly, some died in exercising their profession. Let us remember them in our prayers with much gratitude.

In the vortex of an epidemic with disturbing and unexpected effects, the reliable and generous

presence of medical and paramedical staff became a certain reference point, first and foremost for the sick, but in a truly special manner for families, who in this case did not have the opportunity to visit their loved ones. And thus they found in you healthcare workers, to a certain degree, other family members, capable of combining professional skill with the attention that is a tangible expression of love. Patients often felt they had 'angels' at their side, who helped them recover their health and, at the same time, comforted, supported, and at times accompanied them to the threshold of the final encounter with the Lord. These healthcare workers, sustained by the concern of hospital chaplains, witnessed God's closeness to those who suffer; they were silent artisans of the culture of closeness and tenderness. The culture of closeness and tenderness. And you were its witnesses, even in the little things: in the caresses..., even with cell phones, you connected elderly persons who were about to die, with their son, with their daughter, to say goodbye to them, to see them for the last time...; small gestures of the creativity of love... This was good for all of us. The witness of closeness and tenderness.

Dear doctors and nurses, the world has been able to see how much good you have done in a situation of great trial. Even exhausted, you continued to commit yourselves with professionalism and self-sacrifice. How many doctors and paramedics, nurses, were unable to go home and thus slept there, wherever they could because there were no beds in the hospital! And this creates hope. You [addressing the President of the Region] spoke of hope. And this creates hope. You have all been one of the important pillars of the entire country. My esteem and my sincere gratitude — and I can well imagine everyone's sentiments — go to you here present and to your colleagues throughout Italy.

Now it is time to make precious use of all of this positive energy that has been invested. Do not forget! It is a richness that in part, surely, was 'uncompensated' during the drama of the emergency; but in a large part it can and must bear fruit for the present and future of the society of Lombardy and of Italy. The pandemic deeply marked the lives of individuals and the history of the community. In order to honour the suffering of the sick and of so many deceased, above all, the elderly, whose life experience should not be forgotten, we must rebuild our tomorrow: it requires everyone's commitment, strength and dedication. It means setting out anew from the countless witnesses of generous and gratuitous love, that have left an indelible impression in consciences and in the social fabric, teaching how much need there is of closeness, care, sacrifice in order to nurture fraternity and civil coexistence. And, looking to the future, Fra Felice's discourse in the lazarette, in Manzoni [*The Betrothed*, chapter 36] comes to mind: he looks at tragedy, he looks at death, with so much realism, but he looks to the future and carries on.

In this way, we can emerge from this crisis spiritually and morally stronger; and that depends on the conscience and responsibility of each one of us. Not alone, however, but together and with the grace of God. As believers it is up to us to witness that God does not abandon us, but in Christ he gives meaning even to this reality and to our limitations; that with his help we can face the most difficult trials. God created us for communion, for fraternity, and now more than ever the

pretension of being wholly focused upon oneself — of making individualism the guiding principle of society — has proved illusory — it is illusory. But let us be attentive because, as soon as the emergency has passed, it is easy to slide, it is easy to fall back on this illusion. It is easy to quickly forget that we need others, someone to take care of us, to give us courage. Forgetting that we all need a Father who stretches his hand out to us. Praying to him, invoking him, it is not an illusion; the illusion is thinking we can do without this! Prayer is the soul of hope.

In these months, people were unable to participate in person in liturgical celebrations, but they never stopped feeling they were a community. They prayed individually or as a family, even by means of social communications, spiritually united and perceiving that the Lord's embrace surpassed the spatial limitations. The pastoral zeal and creative care of priests helped people to continue the journey of faith and not to remain alone in the face of pain and fear. This priestly creativity that defeated some, a few 'adolescent' expressions against the measures of authority, who have the obligation to safeguard people's health. Most have been obedient and creative. I have admired the apostolic spirit of so many priests, who reached people by telephone, or went knocking on doors, calling at homes: 'Do you need anything? I will do your shopping...'. A thousand things. Closeness, creativity, without shame. These priests who remained beside their people in attentive and daily sharing: they have been signs of God's comforting presence. They have been fathers, not adolescents. Regrettably quite a few of them have died, as have doctors and paramedical staff too. And even among you there are several priests who were sick and thank God have been healed. Through you I thank all the Italian clergy, who have offered proof of courage and love to the people.

Dear brothers and sisters, I renew to each of you and to those whom you represent my deep appreciation for what you have done in this arduous and complex situation. May the Virgin Mary, worshiped in many shrines and churches in your lands, accompany you and sustain you always with her maternal protection. And do not forget that with your work, all of you, doctors, paramedics, volunteers, priests, religious, lay people, who have done this, you have begun a miracle. May you have faith and, as that tailor, and theologian who missed his calling used to say, "I have never found that the Lord began a miracle without finishing it well" [Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, ch. 24]. May he complete this miracle that you have begun! For my part, I continue to pray for you and for your communities, and I warmly impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you. And please, do not forget to pray for me. I need it. Thank you.

[Blessing]

Now, the 'liturgy' of greeting. But we have to be obedient to the regulations: I will not make you come here; I will come, passing by, to greet you courteously, as one must do, as the authorities have told us to do. And in this way, as brothers and sisters, we shall greet and pray for one another. First let us take a photo together and then I will come to greet you.

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