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Audience with representatives of the Medical Area of the Health Pastoral Office of the Diocese of Rome

Today, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis received in audience a delegation of representatives of the Medical Area of the Health Pastoral Office of the diocese of Rome, on the occasion of the World Day of the Sick.

The following is the Pope's address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank Dr. Edith Aldama for the words she addressed to me on behalf of your area of work, the expression of the health pastoral care of the diocese of Rome. And I thank Bishops Paolo Ricciardi and Benoni Ambarus, and all those who collaborate in this field.

We are meeting in the context of the World Day of the Sick, which this year, as part of the Synod journey, has as its theme the Gospel motto: "Take care of him" (*Lk 10:35*). They are the words that, in the Gospel of Luke (cf. *Lk 10: 25-37*), the good Samaritan addresses to the innkeeper, to whom he entrusts the wounded man he has rescued. Let us think again of that scene: there is man who has been attacked by brigands and is lying at the roadside; the indifference and insensitivity of the passers-by make him an outcast, ignored. At a certain point someone stops and comes to his aid: he is a Samaritan. Looking more closely, both the attacked man and the Samaritan bear wounds: the first has those produced by the violence of the person who robbed him; the second has those inflicted by the contemptuous eyes of those who see in him only an unwanted foreigner. And yet, thanks to the sensitivity of those who suffer for those who suffer, from their encounter a story of solidarity and hope[1] is born, which tears down the walls of isolation and fear.

Your work, dear friends, is born precisely of this dynamic: of knowing how to transform the experience of suffering into closeness to the pain of others, overcoming the temptation to close oneself off – lifting up your

head, bending your knee and extending your hand. With you, I would therefore like to emphasize, in the light of the Word of God, three important attitudes in this path: first, *being close to those who suffer*; secondly, *giving a voice to unheard suffering*; and third, *becoming an engaging leaven of charity*.

Let us remember first of all how important it is *to be close* to those who suffer, offering listening, love and acceptance. But in order to do this, we must learn to see, in our brother's pain, a "signal of precedence", which deep in our heart forces us to stop and does not allow us to go any further. This is a sensitivity that increases the more we allow ourselves to be involved in the encounter with those who suffer. And walking together like this helps us all to grasp the truest meaning of life, which is love.

It is important, then, to *give voice* to the unheard suffering of those who, in sickness, are left alone, deprived of economic and moral support, easily exposed to desperation and the loss of faith, as can happen to those who are affected by fibromyalgia and chronic pain. I pose a challenge to our cities, which are often deserts of humanity and deaf to compassion. Yes, many times our societies are like this. Let us welcome to cry of those who suffer and ensure it is heard. Let us not leave them closed off in a room, nor allow it to simply become "news": let us make room for it within us and amplify it with our personal and concrete involvement.

And we come to the third attitude: being a leaven of charity means "networking". How? Simply sharing a style of gratuitousness and reciprocity, because we are all in need and all of us can give and receive something, even just a smile. And this makes a "net" grow around us, which does not capture, but frees, a net made up of hands that hold each other, arms that work together, hearts that unite in prayer and in compassion. Even in the midst of the most violent waves, this net expands but does not break, and it allows those in danger of being submerged and drowning to be brought ashore. And let us not forget that the example of those who take the initiative also helps others to find the courage to let themselves get involved, as your presence here shows: patients, healthcare workers and those who belong to the world of sport, united in a common commitment to the good of people. Being a network means working together as members of one body (cf. *1 Cor 12:12-27*). The suffering of one becomes the suffering of all, and the contribution of each person is welcomed by all like a blessing.

Dear friends, being close to those who are in pain is not easy; you are well aware of this. Therefore I say to you: do not be discouraged! And if you encounter obstacles or misunderstandings, look into the eyes of your suffering brother or sister, and remember the words of the Good Samaritan: "Take care of him". In that face it is Jesus himself who is looking at you, he who wanted to share our weakness, our fragility, to the point of dying for us and who, risen, never abandons us! In him we find the strength not to give up, even in the most difficult moments.

The last word is for you, ailing brothers and sisters. It is your suffering, lived with faith, that has gathered us here today to share this important moment. In fragility you are close to the heart of God. Understanding fragility, caressing fragility, comforting fragility: this is the road we must take. I ask for your prayers for this, for you who are sick, so that closeness to those who suffer and a concrete commitment to charity may grow among us, and so that no cry of pain will go unheard. From my heart I bless you all, I bless your work and your pastoral commitment. And please do not forget to pray for me. Thank you!

[1] Cf. *Message for the 31st World Day of the Sick 11 February 2023* (10 January 2023).
