Pope Francis: “Illness is a school in which we learn to love”

In his homily for the Jubilee of the Sick and Healthcare Workers, taking place on the 5th and 6th of April, Pope Francis drew inspiration from the prophet Isaiah.

In his sermon, which was read aloud by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, Pope Francis invited the faithful to contemplate the situation of the Israelites in exile: “it seemed that all was lost”, the Pope said. However, he continued, it was precisely in their moment of trial that a new nation was bring born.

Pope Francis compared this experience to the woman in the day’s Gospel reading, who had been condemned and ostracized for her sins. Her accusers, ready to cast the first stone, were halted by the quiet authority of Jesus who told her “Go your way. You are free. You are saved”.

In comparing the stories, Pope Francis says that God does not wait for our lives to be perfect before he intervenes in them. Rather, said the Pope, “He enters into our wounds. He knocks at our door, not despite our suffering, but because of it”.

Illness and care

Turning then to those who are ill and to all those who assist them, the Pope acknowledged the deep suffering that illnesses can bring. “It can make us feel like the people in exile… or like the woman in the Gospel,” he said. But, he continued, it can also be a place of encounter, a “school” in which we learn to love and be loved with humility and grace.

Pope Francis then reflected on his own illness, and consequent dependence on others, describing it not as a burden but as a lesson in trust, gratitude and hope. “Let us not push back”, he said, adding: “Let us allow ourselves to be loved”.

Pope Francis then turned to the healthcare professionals, thanking them for their work and encouraging them to receive every patient as an opportunity to renew their sense of humanity. “The sickbed can become a holy place,” he said, “where charity burns away indifference and gratitude nourishes hope.”

Call to compassion

Bringing his address to a close, Pope Francis recalled the words of his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI, who reminded the Church that “the true measure of humanity is determined in relation to suffering”. A society that turns its back on the weak, he warned, becomes cruel and inhuman.

Finally, Pope Francis urged all those present to resist the temptation to marginalise and forget those who are elderly, ill, or weighed down by the hardships of life. “Let us not banish suffering from our surroundings,” he said. “Let us not exclude those who are frail.” Instead, we must allow God’s love – poured into our hearts – to transform even suffering into a space of communion and growth.

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