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Missionary Prayer Intention - "That the Lord may sustain the efforts of health workers assisting the sick and the elderly in the world's poorest regions" - Comment on the Missionary Intention for February 2012

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "I was ill and you cared for me" (Matthew 25:36). These words of the Lord led the believers to have a special sensitivity for those suffering from disease or old age, recognizing in them the living presence of Christ. If in poor countries, life is difficult for everyone, it is much more to those who suffer physical pain or abandonment in old age.

Probably even more painful than physical pain is the moral pain of abandonment that many of our brothers and sisters live. Who has not felt one's heart touched in seeing some reportages on missionary work, the women religious gathering human beings lying in the street and devoured by misery? Are not they, and many others like them, a living testimony of Christ, the Good Samaritan?

We are in danger of being infected with selfish individualism which prevails everywhere in our society. Everyone tends to think only of oneself, claiming that the suffering of others is not his/her problem. According to Benedict XVI, The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through "com-passion" is a cruel and inhuman society". (Spe Salvi, 38).

Somehow, people who dedicate themselves to the beautiful and difficult task of caring for the sick and the elderly are a kind of incarnation of Christ, the merciful and compassionate. They extend into the world His tenderness for the those who suffer. In many passages in the Gospels we see that the Lord took pity on others, their physical or mental suffering. But, even more, Christ took upon his shoulders the pain and physical and moral wounds of man, of every man, and took them with Him on the cross. As St. Peter says: "By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pt 2, 24). In the words of Pope: "Only a God who loves us to the extent of taking upon himself our wounds and our pain, especially innocent suffering, is worthy of faith". (Urbi et Orbi, Easter 2007).

Those who know how to take on their shoulders the pain of the sick and the abandoned, they become the living presence of Christ, witnesses of his love for men. And together with the testimony of the service of charity, missionaries must carry out an even bigger service: to help those suffering to find the meaning and the reason of their pain. The Pope told the young who live the experience of illness: "the Cross often frightens us because it seems to be the negation of life. In fact, it is the opposite! It is God's 'yes' to man, the ultimate expression of his love and the source from which eternal life springs. In fact, from the open heart of Jesus on the cross this divine life flowed, always available for those who accept to raise their eyes towards the Crucified"(Message for World Youth Day 2011, n. 3).

Mary is the Mother of the Crucified, who was with hope and strength in faith, at the foot of her Son's cross. She is always beside the cross and the pain of all her children, towards whom she exercises the new maternal mission received on the Calvary. As Mother of Hope she teaches us to transform pain into joy without end, since the sufferings of this present time are nothing compared with the glory which one day will be revealed. (Agenzia Fides 30/01/2012)

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