

## May 17 speech of Pope Francis to Association of Catholic Healthcare Workers

Dear brothers and sisters!

I greet all of you, members of the Catholic Association of Health Care Workers, in particular your President, whom I thank for his words - he said he loves me, that you love me: this is good for me! And I also greet the ecclesiastical consultant. I am pleased to meet you and to share with you the intent to defend and promote life, starting from those who are most defenseless or in need of assistance because they are sick, or elderly, or marginalized, or because they face existence and ask for be welcomed and looked after. To all of them, in different ways, you provide an irreplaceable service whenever, as health workers, you offer them the care they need or the closeness that sustains them in their fragility.

The memory of the 40th anniversary of the foundation of ACOS urges us to thank the Lord for what you have received from the Association and for what it has allowed you to work in this time for the improvement of the health system and the working conditions of all health workers, as well as for the condition of the sick and their families, who are the first recipients of your commitment.

In recent decades, the system of assistance and care has changed radically, and with it the way of understanding medicine and the relationship with the patient have also changed. Technology has reached sensational and unexpected goals and has paved the way for new techniques of diagnosis and treatment but placing ever more strongly ethical problems. In fact, many believe that any possibility offered by the technique is in itself morally feasible, but, in reality, any medical practice or intervention on the human being must first be carefully assessed if it actually respects human life and dignity. The practice of conscientious objection - today it is questioned -, in extreme cases where the integrity of human life is endangered, is therefore based on the personal need not to act differently from one's ethical conviction, but it also represents a sign for the healthcare environment in which we find ourselves, as well as for the patients themselves and their families.

The choice of the objection, however, when necessary, must be made with respect, so that what must be done with humility, so as not to generate an equal contempt, which would prevent the understanding of the true motivations that drive us. Instead, it is good to always seek dialogue, especially with those who have different positions, listening to their point of view and trying to transmit yours, not as someone who goes up in the chair, but as someone who seeks the true good of people. Be the traveling companions of those around us, especially the last, the most forgotten, the excluded: this is the best way to fully understand the different situations and the moral good that is involved.

This is also the way to give the best testimony to the Gospel, which casts on the person the powerful light that from the Lord Jesus continues to project onto every human being. Christ's humanity is the inexhaustible treasure and the greatest school, from which to continually learn. With his gestures and his words, he made us feel the touch and the voice of God and taught us that every individual, above all who is last, is not a number, but a person, unique and unrepeatable.

It is precisely the effort to treat the sick as people, and not as numbers, that must be done in our time and taking into account the form that the health system has gradually taken on. Its corporatization, which has placed the needs of cost reduction and service rationalization in the foreground, has fundamentally changed the approach to illness and the patient himself, with a preference for efficiency that often placed second plan attention to the person, who needs to be understood, listened to and accompanied, as much as he needs a correct diagnosis and effective treatment.

Healing, among other things, passes not only from the body but also from the spirit, from the ability to regain confidence and react; therefore the patient cannot be treated as a machine, nor can the health system, public or private, be conceived as an assembly line. People are never the same, they must be understood and cared for one by one, as God does: God does so. This obviously requires a considerable commitment on the part of healthcare professionals, which is often not sufficiently understood and appreciated.

The care that you give to the sick, so demanding and engaging, requires that you also take care of yourself. In fact, in an environment where the patient becomes a number, you too risk becoming one and being "burned" by too hard work shifts, by the stress of emergencies or by the emotional impact. It is therefore important that healthcare professionals have adequate safeguards in their work, receive proper recognition for the tasks they perform and can use the right tools to always be motivated and trained.

That of formation is an objective that your Association has always pursued, and I invite you to carry it forward with determination, at a time when we often lose sight of the most basic values of respect and protection of everyone's life. The training you propose is not only a comparison, study and updating, but also a special care for spirituality, so that this fundamental dimension of the person is rediscovered and appreciated, often neglected in our time but so important, especially for those who live the illness or it is close to those who suffer.

I encourage you, brothers and sisters, to always value the associative experience, facing with new enthusiasm the challenges that await you in the areas that we have considered together. Good synergy between regional offices will ensure that the forces of individuals and various local groups do not remain isolated but are coordinated and multiplied.

To keep your spirit alive, I urge you to be faithful to prayer and to nourish yourselves with the Word of God: always with the Gospel in your pocket, always at hand: five minutes, we read, so that the Word of God enters us. Inspire the example of the constancy and dedication of the saints: many among them have served the sick, especially the most abandoned, with love and disinterest. Regarding the Gospel in my pocket, I read the story of a missionary - perhaps you know him, it's true - of a person I believe from the Amazon, indigenous, who always carried the Gospel in his pocket. He was illiterate, he could not read, but he carried the Gospel in his pocket, all ruined by the many years in which he carried it. And once the missionary asked him: "Why do you bring the Gospel if you can't read?" - "It's true, I can't read, but God knows how to talk!" That awareness that in that Book there is the Word of God, that speaks to us, always. Always with the Gospel in your pocket.

Dear friends, I accompany you with my prayer in this precious task of witnessing. I entrust you to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to which your Association is consecrated. He who, in a clear way, practiced welcoming and charity, always remains for us a refuge in fatigue and a model of service to the brothers. Please don't forget to pray for me and go ahead. Thank you!