



February 11, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Each year, the World Day of the Sick affords us the opportunity to pray for the infirm and to reflect upon the various ways illness affects us personally and collectively. In his message for this year, Pope Francis reminds us that we are called to make sure no one suffers alone in their sickness. He writes,

Our lives, reflected in the image of the Trinity, are meant to attain fulfilment through a network of relationships, friendships and love, both given and received. We were created to be together, not alone. Precisely because this project of communion is so deeply rooted in the human heart, we see the experience of abandonment and solitude as something frightening, painful and even inhuman. This is all the more the case at times of vulnerability, uncertainty and insecurity, caused often by the onset of a serious illness.

The Holy Father helps us to embrace the truth that God created human beings like Himself, to be in relationship with one another. Each of us can attest that loneliness leads to a kind of suffering, especially in times of trial. Those experiencing a serious or long-term illness know all too well the loneliness that comes with such a diagnosis. We can hear the call out of isolation and individualism to be a balm and great consolation to others in their illness by simply being with them.

We all know someone who has been seriously ill or faced a long-term illness. Our Lord encourages us, and demonstrated Himself, that we should show compassion and love to those suffering sickness. In the Gospels, we read that Jesus healed all manner of disease and sickness. He did not distance Himself from the sick. He stood among them and shared their suffering. He embraced them and called them to Himself. From the earliest days of the Church, Christians have followed this example caring for the sick and the suffering.

As I write to you on this occasion, we are days away from the season of Lent. During Lent, we turn to works of prayer, fasting and almsgiving to grow closer to God. The Holy Father's words inspire me to call us to follow the great tradition of our Christian forebears, using our most accessible resource, our time, to reach out in compassion to those who are ill. Lent is a very good time to do that. Such outreach is an opportunity for self-sacrifice to give of ourselves to others. Spending time with someone who is sick helps to build a bridge of communion over which comfort, care, and compassion can easily pass. Simple acts, like a visit, a card, or phone call, can help someone suffering know that they are not alone; they have the Church community caring for them and sharing their burden.

Our prayers go out to all those experiencing a serious or long-term illness. We pray, too, for all those who care for the sick – doctors, nurses, staff and volunteers, chaplains and pastoral caregivers, families and friends – may God use their hands and voices to heal and bring hope. Through the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes, may God bring comfort and healing to those who carry the cross of infirmity.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg