



## *XXXIV World Day of the Sick, 11 February 2026* *“The compassion of the Samaritan: loving by bearing another’s pain”*

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To cure is the work of medicine, about which there's always lots of news. But Pope Leo XIV's Message for the 2026 World Day of the Sick is about *healing*, which is broader and deeper than curing diseases. It takes courage to read this Message attentively and take it personally, with an open mind and an open heart. It doesn't leave you as you were.

How do we treat the sick, the aged, people with disabilities, the poor among us? And even if one belongs to one or more of those categories, there's always others around who're suffering and whom one can encounter and respond to. “I was sick, and you visited me” (Matthew 25:36), Jesus explains how near He is, how easy to meet, if we have the courage to reach out to “one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine” (Matthew 25:40).

Every papal message calls us back to basics, but I think that this Message is really for everyone. It is for Christians and for all others alike. It will be interesting, illuminating to hear what non-Christians think about it.

The Message is in three parts: the first is about encounter, which turns out to be so important, not only for the sick, but for everyone. The second is about compassion, without which there's no healing. And the third is about true love.

I) In our hyper-connected world, there has never been so much talk about isolation, loneliness, hopelessness, despair. So, the importance of encounter: everyone needs “a listening ear”, but the sick make it so obvious, so tangible, so immediate. Encounter needs to be real, not sentimental, fleeting, electronic. Real encounter is courageous, inclusive. So, responding to the sick puts the quality and truth of our relationships to the test. The Holy Father gives us the great example of the Good Samaritan, not to be admired but to be imitated, and the Message encourages us to do so.

II) In the second part, the Holy Father shares his own experience as a missionary and bishop in Peru. He has seen many people showing “mercy and compassion in the spirit of the Samaritan and the innkeeper. Family members, neighbours, healthcare workers, those engaged in pastoral care for the sick, and many others stop along the way to draw near, heal, support and accompany those in need.” While traditionally addressed to Catholic healthcare and pastoral workers, this year's Message reaches out to everyone,

for we're one body, one humanity of brothers and sisters, and when someone's sick and suffering, all the other categories – which tend to divide – fade away into insignificance. "The pain that moves us is not external or strange, but the pain of a member of our own body," whom Christ our Head commands us to care for, for the good of all.

III) The third and final section is about true love. It has three essential and inseparable dimensions: love of God, love of neighbour, and loving oneself. The first is mysterious, the third is elusive, but to love one's neighbour – whom Jesus identifies as anyone who has need of us – is within everyone's reach. "To serve one's neighbour," says Pope Francis, "is to love God through deeds", and Pope Benedict XVI: "It is not by isolation that man establishes his worth, but by placing himself in relation with others and with God." This is worth thinking about, and striving for, for the whole of one's life.

I am fortunate to be representing Pope Leo in presenting this message in his home diocese of Chiclayo, in Peru, on 11 February, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and the 34<sup>th</sup> World Day of the Sick. It is my hope that this Message will not only be heard on that day, but will continue to inspire gestures of encounter, compassion and love wherever sickness and suffering are found.