



(ZENIT, Vatican City, June 9, 2016).- Pope Francis has reminded doctors that they need to put heart into their important work.

Addressing the Medical Associations of Spain and Latin America this morning in the Vatican, the Pope stressed that a physician's identity relies not only on skills, but mainly on a compassionate and merciful attitude towards those who suffer in body and spirit, reported Vatican Radio.

Compassion, the Argentine Pontiff stressed, is the very soul of medicine and is not pity, but "suffering -with." But in our individualistic and highly technological culture, the Pope lamented that compassion, at times, is not well received by those who see it as a humiliation.

"There are even some who hide behind alleged compassion to justify killing a patient," the Pope said.

"True compassion," Francis reminded the physicians, "does not marginalize, humiliate or exclude and doesn't celebrate the passing away of a patient. No, this is the triumph of selfishness, of the "culture of disposability" that rejects people who do not meet certain standards of health, beauty or utility."

"Health is one of the most precious gifts and everyone desires it."

Compassion

Compassion, the Pope explained, is the appropriate response to the immense value of the sick person, a response made of respect, understanding and tenderness, because the sacred value of the life of the patient does not disappear, neither is it ever darkened, but it shines with more splendor precisely in the person's suffering and helplessness.

"This is what is understood when St. Camillo de Lellis says with respect to

treating patients: “Put more heart in those hands,” Francis said.

“Fragility, pain and disease are a tough test for everyone, including medical staff; they are a call to patience, to suffer-with; therefore one cannot yield to the temptation to apply quick, merely functional and drastic solutions driven by false compassion or by criteria of efficiency or cost savings. At stake is the dignity of human life; at stake is the dignity of the medical vocation.”

Christus Medicus

“The biblical tradition has always highlighted the closeness between salvation and health,” Francis said recalling the title with which the Church Fathers employed in reference to Christ and His work of salvation: *Christus Medicus*.

“He is the Good Shepherd who cares for the wounded sheep and comforts the sick (cf. Ez 34,16); he is the Good Samaritan who does not pass before the badly injured person by the wayside but, moved by compassion, he heals and serves (cf. Lk 10.33 to 34). Christian medical tradition has always been inspired by the parable of the Good Samaritan.”

This tradition, he continued is identified with the love of the Son of God, who did good and healed those in need.

“How much good the practice of medicine does in thinking of the sick person as our neighbor, as our flesh and blood, and the mystery of the flesh of Christ himself reflected in his wounded body! ‘Every time you did it to one of these, my brethren, you did it to me’ (Mt 25:40).”

Pope Francis concluded, thanking those present for their daily efforts to accompany, nurture and enhance the immense gift of the human person, and asked them to pray for him.

Below is a ZENIT translation of Pope Francis’ address to the Medical Associations of Spain and Latin America Thursday morning in the Vatican:

Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning!

I am happy to meet with all of you, members of the Latin American Medical Associations. I thank Dr Rodriguez Sendin, President of the Collegial Medical

Organization of Spain, for his kind words.

This year, the Catholic Church is celebrating the Jubilee of Mercy, and this is a good occasion to acknowledge and express gratitude to all the health professionals that, with their dedication, closeness and professionalism to persons suffering an illness, can become a true personification of mercy. The doctor's identity and commitment not only leans on his knowledge and technical competence, but primarily on his compassionate (he suffers-with) and merciful attitude to those suffering in body and spirit. Compassion is in some way the very soul of medicine. Compassion is not pity, but to suffer-with.

In our technological and individualist culture, compassion is not always well regarded; on occasions it is held with contempt because it means subjecting the individual that receives it to a humiliation. Moreover, there is not lack of those that shield themselves in an alleged compassion to justify and approve the death of a patient. And it's not so. True compassion does not marginalize, humiliate or exclude anyone, and much less does it consider his demise as something good. True compassion, assumes it. You well know that that would mean the triumph of egoism, of that "disposable culture" that rejects and has contempt for individuals that do not fulfill specific canons of health, beauty or usefulness. I like to bless doctors' hands as a sign of recognition of that compassion that becomes a caress of health.

Health is one of the most cherished and desired gifts by all. Manifested always in the biblical tradition is the closeness between salvation and health, as well as its mutual and numerous implications. I like to remember the title with which the Fathers of the Church used to name Christ and His work of salvation: *Christus medicus*, Christ the Doctor. He is the Good Shepherd that cares for the wounded sheep and comforts the sick (cf. *Ezekiel* 34:16). He is the Good Samaritan who does not pass by the wounded individual to the side of the road but, moved by compassion, takes care of him and attends to him (cf. *Luke* 10:33-34). The Christian medical tradition has always been inspired in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is identifying oneself with the love of the Son of God, who "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed" (*Acts* 10:38). How much good it does to the exercise of medicine to think and feel that the sick person is our neighbor, that he is of our flesh and blood, and in whose lacerated body is reflected the mystery of the flesh of Christ Himself! "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Matthew* 25:40).

Compassion, this suffering-with, is the appropriate answer to the immense value of the sick person, an answer made of respect, understanding and

tenderness, because the sacred value of the sick person's life never disappears or is obscured, but it shines with more splendor precisely in his suffering and helplessness. How well understood is Saint Camillus of Lellis' recommendation in treating the sick. It says: "Put more heart in those hands." Frailty, pain and sickness are a harsh trial for all, also for the medical staff; they are a call to patience, to suffer-with. Therefore, one cannot yield to the functionalist temptation to apply quick and drastic solutions, moved by a false compassion or by mere criteria of efficiency and financial savings. At stake is the dignity of human life; at stake is the dignity of the medical vocation. I return to what I said about blessing doctors' hands. And although in the exercise of medicine, speaking technically, asepsis is necessary, at the core of the medical vocation asepsis goes against compassion; asepsis is a necessary medical means in the exercise but it must never affect the essence of that compassionate heart. It must never affect that "put more heart in those hands."

Dear friends, I assure you of my appreciation for the effort you make to dignify your profession more every day and to accompany, look after and value the immense gift that individuals are who are suffering because of illness. I assure you of my prayer for you: you can do so much good, so much good, for yourselves and your families because, how many times your families have to support you, enduring the vocation of a doctor, which is like a priesthood. And I ask you also not to fail to pray for me, who have something of a doctor. Thank you very much.

[Original text: Spanish] [Translation by ZENIT]