



Just as Jesus healed people during his earthly mission, care for the sick is a mission the entire Church is called to take part in, Pope Francis said in a message published Monday for the World Day of the Sick.

“Jesus bestowed upon the Church his healing power...**The Church’s mission is a response to Jesus’ gift, for she knows that she must bring to the sick the Lord’s own gaze, full of tenderness and compassion,**” the Pope wrote in a message published Dec. 11.

“Health care ministry will always be a necessary and fundamental task, to be carried out with renewed enthusiasm by all, from parish communities to the largest healthcare institutions.”

“Doctors and nurses, priests, consecrated men and women, volunteers, families and all those who care for the sick, take part in this ecclesial mission.”

The World Day of the Sick will be celebrated Sunday, Feb. 11, 2018, with the theme: “Mater Ecclesiae: ‘Behold, your son... Behold, your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home (John 19:26-27).”

Reflecting on the scripture passage from which the theme was taken, Francis explained how John, as a close disciple of Jesus, could testify to the fact that Christ healed many people suffering from both spiritual and physical illnesses.

Jesus, he said, “healed the sick as a sign of the abundant life of the Kingdom, where every tear will be wiped away.”

The disciples know that Jesus’ heart is “open to all and excludes no one. The Gospel of the Kingdom must be proclaimed to all, and the charity of Christians must be directed to all, simply because they are persons, children of God.”

Pointing to the Church’s long history of care for the sick, including innumerable

initiatives, Francis said we cannot forget this “history of dedication,” which continues “to the present day throughout the world.”

In countries with adequate public health care systems, Catholic religious congregations and dioceses and their hospitals provide quality medical care that puts the human person at the center, also carrying out scientific research that fully respects life and Christian moral values, he said.

And in countries with inadequate, or even non-existent, health care systems, the Catholic Church works to improve health, eliminate infant mortality and combat widespread disease.

“In some parts of the world, missionary and diocesan hospitals are the only institutions providing necessary care to the population,” he noted.

This is all a cause for rejoicing within the Christian community, but we also need to take that long legacy and use it to help us build a better future, he stressed. Especially in cases where Catholic hospitals fall prey to the business mentality that seeks to turn health care “into a profit-making enterprise, which ends up discarding the poor.”

“Wise organization and charity demand that the sick person be respected in his or her dignity, and constantly kept at the center of the therapeutic process,” he said.

“May our prayers to the Mother of God see us united in an incessant plea that every member of the Church may live with love the vocation to serve life and health.”