

By the SICK, We Will Be Known

Every February 11, the world observes THE DAY OF THE SICK. For 34 years, the Catholic Church has observed this day with a message from the Pope, which, in 2026, will reflect on: *“The compassion of the Samaritan: loving by bearing the pain of the other.”* This 34th Day of the Sick will have as its epicenter the city of Chiclayo in Peru, the diocese that served as the seat of the episcopal ministry of then-Monsignor Robert Prevost (2015–2023), now Leo XIV.

St. John Paul II established the World Day of the Sick in 1992 to dedicate space to prayer, solidarity, accompaniment, and reflection on the shortcomings and hardships in health experienced by millions of people.

This year, through this solemn observance in Peru, the Pope calls on the Church and the world to center their gaze on Latin America. As CEO of SOMOS Community Care, an organization dedicated to the health of New York City residents and that coordinates a network of more than 2,500 physicians and their private clinics, with an emphasis on providing healthcare to vulnerable and immigrant populations, I will share with you some reflections on the importance of this Day, on health and the sick in our society, and some lessons that the Samaritan – from the parable of the Gospel – offers believers in Christ and every man and woman of good will.

The annual observance of the **WORLD DAY OF THE SICK** is especially relevant because it summons us all to an awareness of the theme of health, illness, the sick, their families, medical personnel, and all those dedicated to the care of the sick. This Day issues a call to all social institutions to raise awareness of the urgent need to support and accompany the sick and their loved ones, in every possible and necessary way.

But also, this date observes and recognizes the human suffering that every disease entails and the necessary search for the transcendent meaning of life as a task for every human being and, especially, for those who suffer while they are sick.

The Pope’s annual message for this Day provides ethical, moral, and pastoral guidance for both the Church and society as a whole, with calls to prayer

and action, to overcome indifference and promote compassion and human solidarity, taking into account the value of life, dignity of the human person, need for fraternal relationships that combat loneliness and isolation, and hope as a refuge and bulwark in the face of tribulation and anguish. All of this takes place in a society marked by a culture of ‘discarding’ and ruthless utilitarianism and materialism.

HEALTH cannot be defined simply and negatively, as the absence of disease. Health is so much more: the foundation on which we build our personal and family lives and our lives in community. For this reason, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a “*state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.*”

Health for everyone is the engine of existence and our most valuable resource and treasure, because, without it, all other human goals and aspirations become impossible, chimeras.

In health, human beings enjoy autonomy and freedom. We can achieve potential development, quality of life, success, longevity, and daily satisfaction that drive us in our search for truth, the meaning of life, and happiness.

The importance of health explains why it is a person’s fundamental right. For these same reasons, health also becomes the engine of every society’s progress. Health enables communities to achieve economic productivity, personal development, social cohesion, and the sustainability of public health systems. Health, then, should not be – in any society – a privilege. Instead, health should be a social guarantee that ensures a dignified life for each person.

So why speak of **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SICK IN SOCIETY?** Because every person who is ill brings us back down to earth, reminding us of our humble, fragile, and vulnerable human condition—and our need for solidarity. Every sick person summons us to empathy and fraternal compassion, and mercy. Every sick brother or sister invites us to care for and respect the inalienable and inviolable dignity of every human being.

Each patient, each disease becomes the driving force propelling medical scientific research and, ultimately, the development and progress of social health services. The sick also contribute to family and social unity and cohesion, and to the valuation, in all, of health and healthier lifestyles for the

collective prevention of diseases. In short, patients reflect on and measure the ethical and moral quality of a society.

Finally, **THE FIGURE OF THE SAMARITAN** in the parable of Jesus of Nazareth, the theme of this World Day of the Sick 2026, invites us always to live in the love that serves, especially to love our fallen brothers and sisters in need.

But *what must we do to achieve eternal life?* What must we do to be happy? We must practice mercy. But how to love: to treat others as the Good Samaritan did, who:

- *Even though he was traveling*, occupied with his own affairs...
- He went to the man in need: *he paused*, approached him, and took the initiative,
- *He saw him*: because we almost always pass by without wanting to see others and their needs,
- *He felt pity, compassion, piety, and mercy*. The entirety of his inner being trembled, a shudder urging him to act, solve, heal, save,
- *He approached him*,
- *He bandaged his wounds*,
- *With oil and wine*: luxury products at the time,
- *He rode him on his own horse*: in his own personal history and living conditions,
- *He took him to an inn*: the best lodging of the time,
- *He cared for him*: he committed himself to the life of a brother in need,
- *He paid* - in advance - for his care,
- *He asked that they take care of him*,
- *He promised* to return for him,
- In short, he made the other's problems his own.

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