



Good morning and thank you all for your presence this morning. Thank you to Dr. Filippo Anelli for agreeing to participate and to SOMOS Community Care for launching this very important initiative.

This meeting opportunity seems to me an excellent way to emphasize the importance of the Declaration in support of the role of family physicians around the world. I would like to emphasize two aspects of the text in particular: restoring the doctor-patient relationship to the heart of health systems and recognizing the daily work of millions of physicians who are committed to caring for the sick. And it seems wise that the Declaration goes so far as to call physicians "good Samaritans." It is certainly a title that honors them, but more importantly it holds them accountable to humanity in need of care.

In a general culture corrupted by narcissistic selfishness, to offer some considerations on the link between the Gospel, health, and illness is most appropriate. Over and over again, the Gospel emphasizes Jesus' work of healing: out of 53 miracles reported in the Gospels, as many as 30 are miracles of healing. This alone tells of the importance of healings in the Gospel narratives and thus among the early Christian community. The healing of the sick manifested that God was intervening in human history. Jesus, through the healings, was able to remove the bodies, lives, hearts, and minds of men from the power of evil. It was an action that unequivocally showed God's strong and effective closeness. That is why never in the Gospels is there any mention of resignation to sickness; and never did Jesus accept common explanations of the direct link between sickness and personal sin.

Illness is not just a problem of medicine: it is a demand for help, for love, so that life may be intensified around those who feel it is wounded and weakened. It is important to bring out this therapeutic dimension of the Christian community, especially in a society like ours that, with its social imbalances and its processes of marginalization, worsens the already inherent human weakness. The miracles of healings, understood in the broadest sense, should push Christian communities to be bolder in their relationship with the sick, to feel them as their privileged part to be taken great care of. Let us not forget that Jesus bestowed upon his disciples his own healing power: "He gave them power over foul spirits, to drive them out; and to cure every kind of disease and infirmity."

There is a huge demand for healing around us, a huge demand to care not only for children and the elderly, but for everyone. It is the disease of ego, self-worship, that needs to be healed. And one way to do that is to listen, to look at the whole person: the sick person is never his or her disease. That is why the direct, passionate relationship between the doctor and the sick person is crucial. And when it comes to illness, let us remember a key principle

of the Church: even when we cannot heal, because we know the course of the disease will be fatal, we can always care for each other.

In this sense, the Declaration is an important invitation to remind ourselves that each of us is a person who must be looked into the eyes and seen in his or her totality. Mother Teresa of Calcutta was right when, speaking of Western countries, she observed, "The worst disease in the West today is not tuberculosis or leprosy, but not feeling loved and wanted, feeling abandoned. Medicine can cure diseases of the body, but the only cure for loneliness, despair and lack of prospects is love."

Let me quote the testimony of a non-believing Italian writer, Ennio Flaiano, whose daughter, Luisa, became ill with an epileptoid encephalopathy, and eventually died. This writer had planned to make, in the 1960s, a film-novel, of which, however, only an outline remains, in which he imagines Jesus returning to earth, annoyed by journalists and photo reporters, while he was only attentive to the sick. Flaiano writes at one point, "a man brought his sick daughter to Jesus and said to him: I do not want you to heal her but to love her. Jesus kissed that girl and said: Actually, this man asked for what I truly can give. And so saying, he disappeared in a glory of light, leaving the crowd to comment on his miracles and the reporters to describe them."

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life

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