



Pope's World Day of Sick message: Love by bearing another's pain

Pope Leo XIV releases his message for the 34th World Day of the Sick, and invites the faithful to consider the Samaritan's compassion and how we too can offer love by bearing the pain of others.



By Deborah Castellano Lubov, Vatican News (Article published on Vatican News on January 20, 2026)

"The compassion of the Samaritan: loving by bearing another's pain" is the theme of Pope Leo XIV's message for the 2026 commemoration of the World Day of the Sick to be held on 11 February.

In his message, signed 13 January and released on Tuesday, the Pope encouraged renewed reflection on the figure of the Good Samaritan ahead of the Day to be solemnly celebrated next month in Chiclayo, Peru.

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He noted that this image "is always relevant and essential for rediscovering the beauty of charity and the social dimension of compassion" and helps further "direct our attention towards the needy and all those who suffer, especially the sick."

In the Gospel according to St. Luke, Jesus responds to a scholar of the law, who asks him to identify the neighbor he must love, with this story. A man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by robbers and left for dead. While a priest and a Levite passed him by, a Samaritan took pity on him, bandaged his wounds, took him to an inn and provided for his care.

Pope Leo said he has chosen to reflect on this biblical passage through the lens of the late Pope Francis' 2020 Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* on human fraternity and social friendship.

There, compassion and mercy towards those in need are not reduced to a merely individual effort, but are realized through relationships: with our brothers and sisters in need, with those who care for them and, ultimately, with God who gives us His love, he said.

The Pope went on to divide his message into the gift of encounter in three ways: "The joy of offering closeness and presence"; "The shared mission of caring for the sick"; and, "Always driven by love for God, to encounter ourselves and our neighbor."

Joy of offering closeness

"In the parable, when the Samaritan saw the wounded man, he did not 'pass by.' Instead, he looked upon him with an open and attentive gaze – the very gaze of Jesus – which led him to act."

With this in mind, Pope Leo highlighted that love is not passive, but it goes out to meet the other. Being a neighbor is not determined by physical or social proximity, but by the decision to love. This is why Christians become neighbors to those who suffer, following the example of Christ, the true divine Samaritan who drew near to a wounded humanity.

"The gift of encounter flows from our union with Jesus Christ," he said, stressing, "We recognize him as the Good Samaritan who has brought us eternal salvation, and we make him present whenever we reach out to a wounded brother or sister."

While acknowledging that we live "immersed in a culture of speed, immediacy, and haste—a culture of discard and indifference that prevents us from pausing along the way and drawing near to acknowledge the needs and suffering that surround us," Pope Leo observed that it is precisely in this hectic scenario that we can discover joy from helping others.

Shared mission of caring for the sick

The Pope went on to discuss compassion as a profound emotion that compels us to act, that "springs from within and leads to a committed response to another's suffering."

"In my experience as a missionary and Bishop in Peru," he said, "I have personally witnessed many who show mercy and compassion in the spirit of the Samaritan and the innkeeper," seen in family members, neighbors, healthcare workers, those engaged in pastoral care for the sick, and many others who stop along the way to draw near, heal, support, and accompany those in need.

"By offering what they have," he said, "they give compassion a social dimension, and this experience, occurring within a network of relationships, transcends mere individual commitment."

Pope Leo stated that for this reason, in his recent Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te*, he referred to the care of the sick not only as an "important part" of the Church's mission, but as an authentic "ecclesial action."

Moreover, the Holy Father recalled his having quoted Saint Cyprian to illustrate "how this dimension serves as a measure of a society's health."

"To be one in the One" means truly recognizing that we are members of a single Body that brings the Lord's compassion to the suffering of all people, each according to our own vocation.

Always driven by love for God, to encounter ourselves and our neighbor in the double commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Lk 10:27), we recognize the primacy of love for God and its direct consequences for every dimension of human love and relationship.

"Love for our neighbor," he said, "is tangible proof of the authenticity of our love for God," adding that "to serve one's neighbor is to love God through deeds."

In this regard, Pope Leo recalled that Pope Benedict XVI observed that "as a spiritual being, the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations" and that it "is not by isolation that man establishes his worth, but by placing himself in relation with others and with God."

Praying for this 'Samaritan' spirit

The Holy Father insisted that "the true remedy for humanity's wounds is a style of life based on fraternal love, which has its root in love of God," as he expressed his hope "that our Christian lifestyle will always reflect this fraternal, "Samaritan" spirit."

The Pope invited the faithful to join him in praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Health of the Sick, to assist all who suffer and are in need of compassion, consolation, and a listening ear, with the following ancient prayer, often invoked in families for those living with illness and pain.

"Sweet Mother, do not part from me.

Turn not your eyes away from me.

Walk with me at every moment

and never leave me alone.

You who always protect me

as a true Mother,

obtain for me the blessing of the Father,
Son and Holy Spirit."

Finally, Pope Leo XIV concluded by imparting his Apostolic Blessing to all who are sick, to their families, and to those who care for them, healthcare workers and pastoral workers alike, and in a special way to all participating in this World Day of the Sick.