

disease and every infirmity among the people” (Mt 4: 23), the Church, from her origins moved by the Holy Spirit, has considered it one of her duties and privileges to be at the side of those who suffer cultivating a preferential attention to the sick.

Illness, which is manifested in so many forms and strikes in different ways, gives rise to disturbing questions: why do we suffer? Can the experience of pain be considered positive? Who can free us from suffering and death? These are existential questions that more often than not remain humanly unanswerable, since suffering constitutes an enigma that is inscrutable to human reason. Suffering is part of the very mystery of the human person... And as noted in my Encyclical *Spe Salvi* "stems partly from our finitude and partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history..."

God alone can eliminate the power of evil. Precisely because Jesus Christ came into the world to reveal to us the divine plan of our salvation, faith helps us to penetrate the meaning of all that is human, hence also of suffering. Thus an intimate relationship exists between the Cross of Jesus the symbol of supreme pain and the price of our true freedom and our pain, which is transformed and sublimated when it is lived in the awareness of God's closeness and solidarity. Padre Pio sensed this profound truth and said that in "the suffering person must experience God's love through the wise acceptance of his suffering in serene meditation on his own destiny"... Pio noted that in the Home for the Relief of Suffering "the patients, doctors and priests shall be reservoirs of love"...

To be "reservoirs of love" is the mission of which our Saint reminds you who in various capacities form the great family of this Home... We must not forget the Prayer Groups who "along side the Home for the Relief of Suffering are the front line of this citadel of charity, nurseries of faith and hearts of love" (Padre Pio, *Discourse*, 5 May 1966). I invoke upon each and every one the intercession of Padre Pio and the motherly protection of Mary, health of the Sick. I thank you again for your welcome and as I assure you of my prayers for each one of you, I warmly Bless you all.

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## Home for the Relief of the Suffering

Padre Pio loved people, loving them truly as God's children and as his own brothers and sisters. For this reason he devoted much of his life to prayer and became "the scapegoat" of his fellow-beings to ensure their spiritual well-being. In order to soothe physical pain and wounds, he set up his very own "cathedral of charity" known as the "House for the Relief of Suffering".

San Giovanni Rotondo had no hospital facilities as such. Thus Padre Pio had great pleasure when the premises of the former Saint Clare's convent were turned into a small nursing home. "Saint Francis' Civil Hospital" was opened on 25 January 1925 and comprised two wards with seven beds each, as well as two rooms where the poor could be nursed free of charge. However, following major damage caused by an earthquake in 1938, the nursery home was closed down thirteen years later and its premises were subsequently refurbished and used as a kindergarten. Yet Padre Pio's idea of charity outlived the destruction caused by the earthquake: on the evening of 9 January 1940, the friar came up with the idea for a "House for the Relief of Suffering". Padre Pio's children in faith promptly joined in on the idea and the first stone of what was to become the "cathedral of charity" was laid at the end of the war, on 16 May 1947.

The wards were opened on 26 July 1954 and the blood bank was established on 5 November. The entire complex was officially opened on 5 May 1956 with a live transmission of the blessing by Pope Pius XII.

Padre Pio himself presented the "child of Providence" to the crowd with these words: "A seed has been sown in the ground which the Lord God shall warm with the rays of His love ... What you see before you is only the earliest stage of this undertaking ... one stage of our journey through life has been completed. Let us not lose momentum. Let us answer God's call for the sake of goodness, with all us doing our duty: I myself through the unending prayers of a humble servant of our Lord Jesus Christ; you through the burning desire to hold the whole of suffering humanity close to your breast, to present it through me to the grace of our Heavenly Father."

In an address by his Holiness Benedict XVI on Sunday, 21 June 2009, upon his monumental entrance of the Home for the Relief of Suffering, his Holiness address the sick, the medical, paramedical and administrative staff of the health-care structure as follows: On my visit to San Giovanni Rotondo, I could not omit a stop at the Home for the Relief of Suffering, conceived of and desired by Saint Pio of Pietrelcina as a "place of prayer and science where the human race united in the Crucified Christ becomes one flock with one Shepherd." For this very reason he wished to entrust it to the material and, above all, spiritual support of the Prayer Groups, who have here the center of their mission of service to the Church. Padre Pio intended that in this well-equipped hospital one could experience first-hand that the commitment of science to treating the sick must never be separated from filial trust in God, who is infinitely kind and merciful. When he inaugurated the Home on 5 May 1956 he described it as a "creature of Providence" and spoke of this institution as a "seed planted on earth by God, which he will warm with the rays of his love."

Here I am among you, therefore, to thank God for the good that you have been doing in this "Home for the Relief of Suffering" for more than fifty years, faithful to the instructions of a humble Capuchin Friar with results recognized at both the scientific and medical levels. Unfortunately it is not possible for me, much as I would like to, to visit every ward and greet the patients one by one, together with those who nurse them. But I do wish to extend to each one the patients, doctors, relatives, health-care workers and pastoral workers a word of paternal comfort and encouragement to continue in this evangelical work together which aims to relieve peoples' suffering, making the most of every resource for the human and spiritual good of the sick and their relatives. With these sentiments, I cordially greet you all...



Every time one enters a place of healing, one thinks naturally of the mystery of illness and pain, to the hope of healing and the inestimable value of good health, of which one becomes aware only when it has been lost. In hospitals one sees first-hand the preciousness of our existence but also its fragility. Following the example of Jesus who travelled through Galilee "healing every