22/11/2021

Patriarchal Encyclical for the Feast of the Holy Physicians



From ancient Christianity to modern times, doctors, nurses, and specialist healers, as well as other simple and conscientious faithful Christians have served “those in illness and suffering” by tangibly expressing God’s love for mankind, after the example and in the image of Christ.

A number of these were distinguished for their holiness, which the Church has recognized by officially canonizing them and including them to its Calendar of Saints. Many of them were physicians, while several others founded hospitals and philanthropic institutions, ministering the sick with humble dedication and meekness. Not only did they have excellent medical knowledge and skills, but they were additionally imbued by the sacrificial love of the Crucified Savior and profoundly grounded in the reality of the Church as the Body of Christ. In this way, medicine and philanthropy were consonant with the medical science of their age, but at the same time consistently incorporated in the ecclesial event.

As bearers of divine grace and imitators of the God-man Christ, who sanctified and renewed all creation through His incarnation, the objective of their endeavors was to introduce the fallen nature of humankind to the new creation by jointly healing

body and soul, thereby demonstrating the value of human existence as a psychosomatic unity, but also the mutual unity between God and humanity. As preachers of truth, these Holy Physicians and Philanthropists understood that, in order for every human being to be healed, all the created world must be restored and integrated. Their philanthropy comprised an expression of the divine hospitality of the Father, who gathers His children under His bosom, the Church, the Hostel of mercy and joy. For the consolation, support and welfare of their patients, they intercede to the Great Physician and Loving God for the healing of our souls and bodies.

In the anguish, fear, pain and sorrow that emerged as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the eyes of the faithful are turned toward these Saints with their healing gifts. These Saints constitute the special anchor and example for doctors, nurses and all those serving in the medical field, who throughout the pandemic have offered extraordinary efforts in order to save lives and provide care, treatment and relief to their fellow human beings who were suffering.

The pandemic revealed the vulnerable dimension of human nature, the prevailing imbalance in the natural environment as a result of greed, the existing division and conflict within the wider society, as well as the tensions within the Church itself. It compelled us to reflect on the way we live out our faith before the tragic threat of death, the loss of our loved ones, and the loneliness created by illness and mourning. It directed us to seek the grace of our loving God through the assistance and intercession of the Saints. Moreover, the pandemic brought to the surface the authentic meaning of philanthropy, the need for collaboration and coordination of all social actors, as well as the mandatory cooperation between Church and medical science. Indeed, the pandemic highlighted eminent individuals in the field of medicine and health care, who, as the Saints, exercised their profession and afforded care and support to the sick, contributed their services with self-sacrifice and tenderness, surpassing human standards under difficult circumstances, in order to confront the multidimensional consequences of this health crisis.

Bearing all these things in mind, our Holy and Sacred Synod decided to establish the Sunday closest to October 17th and 18th each year (when we commemorate the Synaxis of the Holy Unmercenary Healers and the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke the Doctor) as the day of the Synaxis of all the Holy Physicians as an appreciation for the essential contribution of the medical science and its ministers toward humanity.

Beloved doctors and healers, we congratulate you for your invaluable service and thank you paternally, praying that the Lord God may support and strengthen you in

your blessed work. We encourage you to show sincere love and compassion, to honor one another and cultivate earnest faith “serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, being patient in tribulation, remaining constant in prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, and practicing hospitality” (Rm. 12:9–15) so that through you the Holy Trinity and Giver of all good things may be glorified.

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