

WHEN WE OPEN THE DOOR TO THE MEDICINE, DO WE CLOSE THEM IN FRONT OF GOD?

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My son, in thy sickness neglect not thyself,
but pray to the Lord, and he shall heal thee.
Turn away from sin and order thy hands aright,
and cleanse thy heart from all offence.
Give a sweet savour, and a memorial of fine flour,
and make a fat offering, and then give
place to the physician.
For the Lord created him: and let him not depart from thee,
for his works are necessary.
(Sirach 38, 9–13)

When we come into the world, we get a great gift – Life. With this gift we also get a special calling, which can be fully realized with an answer to the question: “Why is God calling you?” In the parable about a vineyard, the world is compared with a vineyard, and people with workers, whom the Lord has hired to work (*Matt 20, 1–16*). The Lord earnestly invites all, saying, “Go ye also into my vineyard” (*Matt 20, 3–4*). St. Gregory the Great responded in a sermon to this parable: “Each of us must appreciate what he does and see if he is already working in the vineyard of God”¹, or responded to the invitation of the Most High to co-operate. So that’s why when we congratulate someone we first wish him health. In the church we put candles, pray privately, and in the Liturgy ask “for health”. During his life a man constantly has to take care of his health and, therefore, is forced to seek help from doctors when needed. After all, a good physical and mental state is the key to a happy life, the opportunity to realize one’s life’s mission. Therefore, health (physical and mental, as a certain integrity) is one of the most valuable gifts God has given to us. And it depends on us whether we will increase it as in the parable of the talent, or bury it (*Matt 14, 30*).

The Bible says that joy is special wisdom. A man’s life is overburdened

¹ Іван Павло II [John Paul II], *Christifideles laici*, Львів: Місіонер, 1998, p. 6.

with difficulties and challenges, but he has to keep joy in his heart and to trust the Lord even in sickness. Thus, meeting with illness in everyday life, it is important to remember that patients are also “designed to work in the vineyard”². In the allocution of Synodic Fathers are the following words: “All of you, [...] sick, disabled, [...] the Church is involved in your suffering, which leads to the Lord. [...] We look forward to your testimony, to teach the world what love is...”³ When people are sick, they are trying to find help from doctors and are also trying to find a person, who can support, understand and be compassionate. Blessed Pope John Paul II in his speech to the members of the Congress of Medicine and Surgery noted: in the relationship between patient and doctor there is a special “meeting of confidence and consciousness”⁴. “The confidence of the person, who is suffering and sick, and thus – a man in need that relies on another person’s conscience. A person, who is able to meet the needs of patients and goes to meet them with care and treatment is the public health worker”⁵. Echoing Hippocrates and other prominent doctor-thinkers, the Pope calls for perceiving the patient holistically, not as a separate clinical case: “No one can be limited to being a doctor of an organ or system, but has to study the whole person”⁶.

Remembering that “in his incarnation the Son of God joined to each man”⁷, the representative of public health services should primarily see Christ in the sick person, because “I was sick and you visited me” (*Matt* 25, 36). The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that the doctor should realize his mission exactly in such image – to stop near the sick person and show her his love and care (*Luke* 10, 29–37). The doctor’s mission is not reflected in the domination over the life of another person. Instead, the mission of a doctor is therefore to be a servant (*diaconos*) of needy and sick people. Realizing that inside of us there is a living Christ, the doctor has to understand that “the Gospel tells him to see in a sick person *Christus patiens*, then a doctor needs to behave so that everyone can see *Christus servus*”⁸.

² *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴ *Хартія працівників охорони здоров’я* [*Charter of health care*], Львів, 1999, p. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Іван Павло II [John Paul II], *Novo millennio ineunte*, Секретаріат Синоду Єпископів УГКЦ, 2002, p. 16.

⁸ Е. Згречча, А. Дж. Спаньйола, М. Л. ді П’єтро [Elio Sgreccia, Antonio G. Spagnolo,

With the significant progress of medicine there was the danger of subordinating the laws of life. Control of fertility, sex change, management of death are a great temptation for modern man. Pope John Paul II notes that

today more than ever, [...] wisdom is the only salvation of man. That in their research and practical endeavors man could act wisely and lovingly, maintaining respect and honor to every human being from the first moment of his existence. This happens when science and technology, with the help of worthy means, protect the life and treat man, from the initial stages of the existence of the fetus.⁹

A nice confirmation of these words is the information from *Catholic correspondent* that “after 5 years in Italy abortion may disappear altogether. Already 71 percent of doctors refuse to do this, guided by a sense of conscience. At many hospitals, and even entire regions, especially in southern Italy, abortion divisions are already closed due to the lack of staff. The same applies to medical academies, in which no one wants to teach future gynecologists how to make an abortion”¹⁰. Pope John Paul II asked them to grow professionally and through their vocation to bear Christ everywhere, “to fulfill their duty – to illuminate the course of time with a Christian spirit in the service of people and society. Christians should participate in public life, that is [...] in various areas aimed at achieving the common good”¹¹. Then the Pope said: “Charges of careerism, the deification of power [...] in any case should not be an excuse, which provokes Christians to refuse to participate in public life”. At the same time, he reminds the fact that we have to deepen our faith and be able to counter its obsessive interference in our lives’ charms of the world. “Be vigilant, be patient, to be able to resist all the difficulties and challenges that life puts in the way.”¹² According to the media in Ukraine, the country lacks about 46 000 doctors and about 6000 doctors annually change their profession or emigrate abroad, 40% are pensioners. In this difficult time, particularly relevant are the words of Blessed Pope John II, spoken 10 years ago in Lviv to the youth: “The

Maria Luisa Di Pietro], *Біоетика [Bioethics]*, Львів: Видавництво ЛОБФ „Медицина і право”, 2007, p. 64.

⁹ Іван Павло II, *Christifideles laici*, p. 85.

¹⁰ <http://catholicnews.org.ua/italiiski-likari-proti-abortiv#point>.

¹¹ Іоанн Павел II [John Paul II], *Дар бессмертной любви [The gift of eternal love]*, Москва: ООО Издательский дом „София”, 2004, p. 84.

¹² *Ibid.*

future of Ukraine depends on you [...] and from that responsibility, you will be able to take. [...] Ukraine needs men and women who have sacrificed themselves to serve the society. [...] Such is the logic of the Gospel, but it is also the logic by which civil society is growing. True civilization is not really measured only by economic progress, but on the whole human, moral, and spiritual development of people. [...] With God's help you can get to meet all the challenges of today. [...] You will be able to go against the current, for example, with confidence to stay in your homeland, to defy the ghost of light happiness abroad"¹³.

Thus, analyzing the words of Blessed Pope John II on the role of doctors in the life of the Church and modern society, we can say that a real doctor and healer of souls is only the man, who realized the fundamental law of Genesis that "happiness is to give more than to receive" (*Acts* 20, 35), to serve and not dominate, to "comfort one another and build" (*1 Cor* 5,11), performing the basic methodological commandment of Christ: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart [...] and thy neighbor as thyself" (*Matt* 22, 37–39).

¹³ *Вітаю тебе, Україно! [Greetings, Ukraine!]*: Пастирський візит святішого отця Івана Павла II в Україну 23–27 червня 2001 року: промови і проповіді [Visit of Pastor John Paul II to Ukraine on 23–27 of June 2001: speeches and sermons], Львів: Свічадо, 2001, р. 78.