

AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF CATHOLIC NURSES THE APOSTOLATE OF CHARITY

*Italian translation of the original speech delivered in French, taken from:
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On August 27, 1935, the participants in the International Congress of Catholic Nurses paid devout and filial homage to Pius XI, at Castel Gandolfo. After the offering of the gifts and the address of homage, the Pope gave this speech, in which he also had important indications about the conflict between Italy and Abyssinia:

Dear daughters, dearest daughters, — here is a sight, a truly magnificent spectacle, a spectacle of filial piety, a spectacle of faith, of religion, and all this in the flaming splendor of charity, and of charity in one of the most exquisite, the most beneficial, the dearest forms to the Heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

We want to do nothing today but contemplate and rejoice in this spectacle, following an old and beautiful Italian phrase: "To see and enjoy".

But behold, dear daughters, you invite Us to speak and to say to you a word that you make truly necessary and urgent: it is a beautiful word of Saint Ambrose, of this soul so beautiful, so pleasant, with such happy expressions: it is Saint Ambrose who says: there is no more urgent duty than to give thanks.

The gratitude of the Father.

It is what We must do, it is what you oblige Us to do first of all with your gifts, with your presents, with your rich gifts, so well presented by personalities so well suited to represent you and to express to Us the sentiments with which, as We well know, you accompany and enliven all these gifts. But here is another gift: the gift that you yourselves present to Us: that of your presence, dear daughters, the most beautiful, the most pleasant, that you have ever been able to bring Us. You are welcome wherever you come from — and you come from many nations! — in the Father's house. You come under such favorable auspices and which are such a great recommendation for you — if you too need a recommendation and a presentation — you come under the auspices of this International Study Committee of Catholic Nurses' Associations, this Committee so well represented by its distinguished President.

You are accompanied, guided, by those reverend fathers who answer to the name of Father Garesché, of Father Creusen, who have come to add to your beautiful and already so important Congress the authority of their name, the importance of their presence and the benefit of their experience and knowledge. We would like to thank them all in particular for this valuable contribution. With the voice of your authoritative interpreter, you express to us, dear daughters, the feelings that animate each and every one of you. You express to us your magnificent programs of charity and, dear daughters as you are, ask the old Father for directions.

We must make a first observation: it does not seem that you need directives, you have so well understood what is the direction in which the charity of Our Lord Jesus Christ desires you, of Him who has unquestionably brought all charity to the world.

However, We understand very well that affectionate daughters like you desire a few words of the Father. We will tell you, then, what you put in your heart and on your lips: we can, after having understood and followed attentively the direction that has been read to us in your name, we can reassure you in a word, saying: "Be more and more, ever better, what you propose to be; this is our directive."

We have heard it now: you want first of all to continue to wage ever more intensely the fight against this paganism and this materialism which threatens us everywhere... And we are no longer at mere threats: great disasters have already been produced in this field. You want to be more and more excellent in your profession, in this noble and holy profession of nursing. You want to help each other by action, by work, by prayer, by filial adherence to the hierarchy, to the Holy See, to the Vicar of Christ, to your Bishops. You want to inform your organization more and more and better and improve it by making it more and more responsive to current needs.

It would seem, dear daughters, that you have read in Our heart and in Our thoughts: this is precisely what We desire, want and recommend to you.

Against materialism and paganism.

First of all, continue the struggle against materialism, because it is by these bad means, to put it all in a word, that the profession of nurses is to be secularized; secularizing it in the ugliest sense of the word, a sad word that unfortunately already has a historically inevitable interpretation. It is that secularization that is the equivalent of de-Christianization: expelling Christ from the bedside of the sick, from the bedside of the suffering, he who came to bring consolation to all suffering, he who wanted to suffer everything in order to console and comfort the suffering.

Here is another precious indication, an indication that fortunately is superfluous for you religious, spouses of the blessed Christ, for you so fervent Christians and so fervent Catholics, as your lives already indicate that you do your utmost in assisting the sick and suffering.

Paganism and materialism want to enter everywhere; It is like telling you that you must be first of all, and above all, at all costs, pervaded by this spirit of spirituality, of Christianity, of Christian supernaturalness. That is the first thing that needs to be done, that is the most urgent need. You must correspond to what the good God himself, the Divine Redeemer, did when he thought of sending his Apostles to the world, to bring it the treasure of His doctrine, His example and His consolations. What did he do? First of all, he was concerned only with filling them with this supernatural, Christian spirit, with making them the bearers of spirituality, of the supernatural.

The law is always the same, indefectible: we can never give to others what we do not have ourselves, and it is precisely to the extent of our wealth that our benefits will be abundant compared to the people who come to us. Now it is precisely this treasure of spirituality, of the supernatural that your assistance wishes to give to the sick.

But you also want material, bodily relief; as Our Lord Jesus Christ also did, He commanded His Apostles: "Go and bring everywhere also well-being, health of the body, but above all and above all bring salvation to souls". The life of the body, yes, but even more, infinitely more, the spiritual life, which goes directly to the soul, that soul from which the body itself draws its true value.

It is like saying: be what you are, always be so, more and more and better.

The perfect nurses. This is an ambition that is not only allowed, but necessary. Have this ambition, this noble, holy, great ambition to be always more and always better than the religious, the great Christians: these are greatnesses to which you have not only the right, but the duty to aspire with all your soul and with all your heart. We are therefore in complete agreement on this first point. But on the second point, when you say that you want to be more and more excellent nurses in this noble employment of your life, then, dear daughters, We are entirely of your opinion. Because this is what must be done: it is absolutely necessary to honor one's own quality, to your essential and sovereign quality, the quality of religious, Catholics and Christians: you must do this state of yours the honor of being perfect nurses. We have already said it on a similar occasion and more than once, but we can repeat it to you too that this is precisely Our paternal ambition. Our greatest pride is to have sons and daughters who honour their quality as Christians, men and women religious by excelling in their professions and social occupations.

We said it one day, in front of a crowd almost as imposing as yours, a crowd of tram drivers: "Our particular ambition, the Pope's ambition, is that you should be the first tram drivers in Rome". Dear daughters: this particular ambition of Ours is higher and sweeter when We say to you: "Our ambition is that you and all those who work with you and in your track should be the most able and best nurses."

The consequences to be drawn in order to always be the best religious and the best Christians are clear: you have nothing but to be inspired by your own rules, and by this common rule: the law of God; the law of the Church, the source of all spirituality, the treasure of all supernatural riches. To be excellent nurses, technically speaking, it will be necessary for you to continue to do more and more, better and better, what you do, that is, to keep up to date with everything you need to know. In fact, it is necessary to know in order to act, and not only to be able to act, but to know what can be done and sometimes, perhaps, what you cannot do or cannot do except by following certain

precautions and observing certain limits. Moral assistance and professional training.

Your dual field of action is in fact the professional and the moral terrain; assistance to infirmities and the morality of this assistance, or rather the moralization of this assistance. We do not want to tell you what you know so well and from your personal experience and from the work of this congress so beautiful and so useful; You know too well not only the scientific difficulties, but also the ever-increasing, ever-widening demands which arise in the name of science and for which your approval and competence are required. You also know the moral difficulties of your work, you know them even too much, precisely because of this paganism, this materialism, which they try to creep everywhere to drive out Christ and which they also want to put the Christian aside in order to consider only man, pure and simple humanity; this humanity so poor, so poor, that the good Lord felt compassion for it to the point of giving himself for it, to the point of dying to revive it and to revive in it those treasures in which it was so rich when it came out of the hands of the Creator; this poor human nature, already so rich, has then fallen into so much poverty, into such inanity.

One wants to see only man; who should replace the Christian (that is, it would be man who should replace God himself) and that great crime is renewed which is already denounced by the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and more so in the apostolic letters: not wanting to see and recognize anything other than the creature and not the Creator.

Dear daughters, here we are once again in agreement. Be therefore the most perfect nurses that can exist and the best of this great work. The advantage will not only be greater glory for God, for religion, for the Church that you represent, which you cannot fail to represent: and with your religious habit and with your profession of Christian life, you become the representatives of religion and therefore the representatives of God.

It is precisely in consideration of this representation that God Himself, the Divine Redeemer, the King of nurses, He who wished to render this service as a nurse to the whole of humanity, spoke of those who will make him blush.

You will make the heart of God holy, divinely proud with the honor that you also render Him with competence in your profession and then there will result in a happy consequence a greater well-being for the poor sick, because Christians, religious, Catholics, competent, you will be more sought after, you will multiply the opportunities to spread good, to be appreciated and to make others appreciated in you, in your persons, in your actions, spirituality, supernaturalness, religion, the Church, God. Here, dear daughters, this is what must be done absolutely, this is what must be said: it is worth living and working, it is worth dying for such a great ideal.

Fraternal mutual help.

And then you want to help each other, with the union of work, with prayer, and that is where we must start. There is no true and lasting union in external activity if there is no union of thought, a deep and intimate union of feelings. Here is something very precious, dear daughters, here is the treasure that you need to procure for yourselves (as we have already said on another occasion) this is what you need to procure first of all, above all, at any cost: unity.

We must ask ourselves what Jesus Christ personally saw with his divine gaze in this profound unity. It was precisely of this unity that he spoke, when he uttered his last prayer, the most moving prayer, the prayer that became almost his head on the eve of his death: *ut unum sint*. Deep union... *sicut et nos unum sumus*... What he wants is a union similar to that of the divine Persons in divine unity. *Sicut et nos unum sumus*... What did the good Lord see in this unity of hearts, thoughts, souls?... Here is an inexhaustible meditation, like any truly divine thought. What we can easily see is what experience tells us again and again: that in truth there is nothing that increases the influence of piety and of all the works of religion, the influence of religion itself as union, concord, true and profound union.

It is true that this union, this concord must in no way diminish emulation. The Apostle speaks of a "provocation of

charity". It is a magnificent word: have a holy emulation among yourselves, provoke each other to something more perfect, which is more and more according to the heart of the good God, but in union, as you have precisely told us in the voice of your interpreter, in the union of prayers, thoughts, works, action and filial adherence to the Holy Church and to the Hierarchy.

The treasures of the Church.

This is true, just as it is true — to return to Our first thought — that in the Church and in the Church alone you will find, dear daughters, as you have found it hitherto with a happy personal experience, all that you need, because it is the Church that is the depository of all this treasure of spirituality, of the supernatural, of which humanity has so much need.

It is the Church that knows and maintains in the world the spirit of Christ, the true spirit of Christianity, and we must not forget this thought so beautiful and so consoling. This Church which is alive in us and in which we live, is the same Church which in its first fruits lived in the Apostles and in the person of Jesus Christ himself. Here is the first Church. And it is always the same that only develops; but in the unity of his supernatural being, in the unity of the indestructible work of the hand and heart of the good God.

It can be said then, and we must say it, that the Church, this Church, has seen Our Lord; it does not only keep Him invisible in the Blessed Sacrament: it has seen Him. The Church lived with Our Lord, with the Apostles; it has understood Him, it has followed Him, it has taken directly from His divine heart and lips all that it was to bring and preserve to the world and to mankind. Here, beloved daughters, is a thought that must always accompany us in order to show us always with all possible evidence what is the path to follow, where is the Master to be consulted, where are the counsels and directives to be followed: in Holy Church.

And finally, you want to strengthen, to refine your organizations more and more. No thought could be more opportune, more necessary, because it is the very nature of things, it is the good God Creator of all that exists, who tells us that we must organize ourselves. What we see continually in the work of the good God, in the terrestrial universe and in the celestial universe, on earth as well as in the immensity of the seas, on the plain as well as on the tops of the mountains, what we see is admirable: wherever the universe is organized, and alongside organisms in which the power and wisdom of organization are evident, we find lowly, almost invisible organisms. sometimes even invisible, and always, in one as in the other, we find an organization. This is the condition, this is the secret of life.

All this marvel of life is due to the organization that reigns everywhere, even where one cannot speak of organic beings, in the mineral world which is even called the "inorganic world", in reality there is an organization everywhere, the great rocks, the smallest crystallized bodies reveal organic laws, laws that have presided over their formation and that preside over their preservation and therefore they are subject to these laws.

The organization of the property.

Organization, dear daughters, is indispensable; Nowadays we see that everything is organized and unfortunately even evil; the initiatives of evil are organized in such a powerful way that it multiplies forces, and extends and carries their action to a great distance. It is necessary that the good, that the good works, that the good initiatives, are organized.

Except for the organization that remains?... All that remains is particularism and individualism. Poor words... Of these words an ancient author said: frigid verb, cold words... Miserable words, like the words *meum* and *tuum*, which only say miserable things like those, and condemned to remain little without ever producing great effects. And finally, for the organization to be ever more powerful, numbers must take on special importance.

We always say and we must always say it without exception: "quality first and quantity second", that is, numbers are never of exclusive importance to us. Quality first; It is said in Italian 'few but good', but it is always necessary to add: 'except to hasten the moment when it will be possible to say: good and many', because when it comes to powerful organizations it is also necessary to ensure that there is no shortage of numbers and it is necessary that everyone, as far as possible, comes to strengthen the organizations that we want to make efficient. Our thoughts, as certainly yours too, go to all those forces that are certainly, even with right intentions, disperse and that prefer to work among themselves or even with forces that are not friends of ours and are therefore neutral. Here are units,

here are a certain number of people who could much more usefully, and let us say it much more legitimately, add to the number of those who, like you, truly work in the shadow of Our Lord and with His spirit.

Because it can be said, and strongly, that true neutrality does not exist: it is an illusion. Theoretically speaking, yes, we hear many things about the goodness, the indifference of works and people. But if theoretically we can speak of neutral action, of neutral activity, in practice it is almost impossible to observe true neutrality, because consciously and unconsciously we work either for good or for evil.

The Lord Jesus is in the sick.

Finally, we would like to make an observation that perhaps has not yet been made enough: neutrality, especially in the terrain that belongs to you, dear daughters, especially when it is a question of care for the sick, neutrality is against the thought of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was so little neutral that he said very clearly and so movingly that it is He Himself in the sick and that what is done to Him is done to the suffering and the sick. And then all neutrality is indeed impossible, and if we were to observe it we would be acting contrary to the thought of Our Lord and His word.

We need to think about these things. It is a great thing, as well as a great consolation for you, to think that what you do is to Our Lord that you really do it, and it is He who declares Himself indebted for all the benefits that you distribute to the sick. This, dear daughters, is what makes you the object of great consolation and which must also make you the object of envy. It is enough to consider that terrible thought of divine judgment, when the good God, the Divine Master who has given us this life, will ask us to account for it. Terrible thought. But, dear daughters, for you it is a thought full of joy; it is truly the announcement of a great glory, for when the good Lord says, "You visited me when I was sick, you comforted me and assisted me," you will be able to answer, "Yes, this is what we have done."

Dear daughters, as a man of genius said very well, there is only one Saint, St. Joseph, who will truly be able to do so at every word of Our Lord, of the Divine Judge, who will say: I was sick, I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was poor, I was torn, and you fed me, and you helped me, you have clothed me, he will be able to answer: yes it is true, it is really true.

Dear daughters, this is the glory and consolation that await you and in which you can rejoice even now. You have the right to do so: it is a right that you have acquired, and an everyday conquest because your whole life is vibrant with this continual concern for charity, assistance, help, comfort that in the person of your sick reaches the very person of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Well, then, We truly speak to you as a Father who converses with his daughters and We add that you must distinguish yourselves as nurses, as talented nurses. And if you need to get diplomas for that, get as many as you need.

Breadth of blessing.

This, moreover, is the thought of St Camillus, one of your patron saints, this saint proclaimed comfort, protector of all the sick. The dear good St. Camillus, already more than thirty years old, realized that a little literature, a little literary culture would also be very useful for the good of souls, and although at this age, he began to study with children to begin studies that he had never done. And he did so in spite of enormous, unprecedented difficulties in obtaining the necessary diplomas and thus being able to devote himself to the education of children.

But, beloved daughters, we must not let ourselves be carried away by this current of thoughts, because we do not know where we will end up, so much is your presence, your filial attention, for us, we can well say, a real temptation to continue this conversation between the old Father and such good daughters. We want to do what you desire, what you are waiting for and for which you have come here: to give you a fatherly blessing. May this blessing therefore descend upon you religious, upon you nurses, upon each of your associations, upon each of your religious families, upon you and, We may add, sure also of interpreting your thoughts, upon your sick, to whom We entrust you with bringing this paternal blessing. You will tell them that we have thought of them and that we

have seen them in spirit each and every one as you will see them again in a little while. Bring Our blessing in all directions, therefore, and also to all those whom you have in your mind and heart, because all the dear and venerable people whom you wish to see blessed with you, We wish to bless equally.

After imparting the blessing welcomed by the most lively acclamations, the Supreme Pontiff entertained the devout audience for a few more moments on some considerations dictated to him by his paternal heart and by his solitudes as Supreme Pastor of all souls:

We had thought we had finished, but we did not finish. You have told us something else just now, something that we do not want to let go of, especially at this time. Through your interpreter you have assured Us that you will pray for Us, that you will pray according to Our intentions, and, in particular, that you will pray for the intention of "the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ" in order to obtain what We all wish: the great joy of seeing this peace finally established in the world.

Prayer for peace.

Well, dear daughters, We thank you especially for this filial word, for this promise: we wish to tell you that We count on Us very much. We would also like to tell you that we believe that we see a special disposition of Providence in this promise that you make and of which your presence at the congress is a beautiful fulfillment. It is precisely the nurses — and if not yourselves, at least all those who have gone before you in this magnificent cooperation of charity — it is precisely the nurses who are most likely to hear what war is.

The war... The nurses have seen it, and if any of you were present at the last war, you cannot forget it.

We have seen it; We who had to cross Europe in the middle of the war and were able to realize the damage it causes, crossing the center of Europe to go where obedience and Providence called Us, to Poland. We arrived in Poland the day after the exit of the Russians, when the traces of the devastation were still almost smoking: that was the reality of war.

Dearest daughters, we want to ask you again to pray especially for this purpose: ask that war be avoided, that it be spared us.

Here is a prayer for which you have a very special competence, by the very fact of your profession as a nurse.

Among you, above all, more than in any other place, we know what war is, who the poor victims of war are. Yes, you wish Us the joy and peace of Christ; it is Our great desire, it is the object of Our daily prayers, of Our continual prayers to the good God, that God of peace, Who, in the splendour of His conceptions, seems to have had nothing in His heart and lips but peace: Pax vobis! Pax vobis!

Wherever he appears, he proclaims himself with peace: Pax vobis... "I give you my peace, this peace which belongs to me particularly; this peace that the world does not know, but that fortunately it will know: Pax vobis".

And note also that if this is the will of God, it is still the preliminary condition for the acquisition of all the goods of social life and of individual life; it is also the precondition for the good of souls. Just remember what the Missions suffered because of the war; It is distressing.

The mere thought of the good of souls, even apart from the Missions, should make us pray for peace. Even in non-mission countries, how many spiritual disorders we have not to deplore as a result of war, how many reverses and devastation of souls!

Nurses know this better than anyone else. Yes, We desire peace, yes, We pray to the Lord to spare us war.

The very thought of war, without adding anything else to it (if it is possible to add anything to it), makes one shudder.

We already see that abroad there is talk of a war of conquest, of an offensive war: this is a supposition to which

We do not even want to stop our thoughts, this is a disconcerting supposition. A war that were only one of conquest would obviously be an unjust war: this is a thing that passes all imagination, here is an unspeakably sad and horrible thing. We cannot think of an unjust war, we cannot admit its possibility and we deliberately discard it. We do not believe, we do not want to believe in an unjust war.

On the other hand, in Italy, it is said that it would be a just war, because a war of defense, to secure one's own borders against repeated and incessant attacks, a war that has become necessary for the expansion of a people that increases day by day, a war undertaken to defend or ensure the material security of a country, Such a war would justify itself.

The greeting of the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

It is true, however, dear daughters, that if this need for expansion can exist, if there is also the need to ensure the security of the borders by means of defense, We can only hope that all the difficulties can be solved by other means than war. What?

Evidently it is not easy to say, but we do not believe that it is impossible. This possibility must be studied. One thing seems to us beyond doubt: and that is that if the need for expansion is a fact that must be taken into account, the right to defense has limits and moderations that must be respected, so that the defense is blameless.

In any case, We pray to the good Lord that He will support the activity and industry of men who are clear seers who understand the demands of the true well-being of peoples and of social justice, of those men who do everything possible, not by means of threats, which can only aggravate the situation by irritating the spirits, and they make this situation more difficult by the day, more threatening — who do everything possible to make peace, to do peace, with the truly sincere intention of averting war. We pray to the good Lord that He will bless this activity, this industry, and We commit you to pray to Us. In this sense We wish to clarify what You have just told Us, that you wish to pray according to Our intentions of peace.

Well, dear daughters, you now really have every detail, you know what Our intention is, what Our desire, what Our need of the precious help of your prayers: and so, dearest daughters, We renew from the heart all the blessings We have given you, praying God to accompany them with all His graces, and to add to them all His graces. so that all these blessings may accompany you all together, not only — for you who come from afar — during the time you still have to spend in this city of Rome, but also later, so that they may be more fruitful for your religious and Christian souls.

May these blessings also accompany you in your happy return to your respective nations, to your families; finally, may they accompany you in all the activity that opens up before you.

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