

# World Day of the Sick: Prayers and reflections on illness, aging, tough decisions, and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI



Today the Church observes the 22nd Annual World Day of the Sick, with the theme of “Faith and Charity: We Ought to Lay Down Our Lives for One Another.” This annual observation was started by Blessed Pope John Paul II in 1992 to pray for those suffering from illness and infirmity, and to offer support to their caregivers. This soon-to-be saint suffered greatly during the late years of his life. He wrote and spoke frequently of suffering and its connection to sanctification and redemption.



## **Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes:**

The Day of the Sick also coincides with the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. People travel from every point of the earth seeking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary at her shrine in Lourdes, France, praying for healing miracles, both physical and spiritual. It is fitting that Blessed John Paul II placed the date for this annual prayer for the sick on a feast which honors the Blessed Virgin to whom he credited his miraculous recovery from the 1981 assassination attempt.

## **Another important connection to this date in history:**

It was on this date last year (2013) that Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI shocked the world by announcing that he had made “a decision of great importance for the life of the Church.” He told those gathered at an ordinary consistory in the Apostolic Palace that he would step down from the papacy at the end of February:

*“After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty that my strengths, due to an advanced age, are no longer suited to an adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry.*

*.... in order to govern the bark of Saint Peter and proclaim the Gospel, both strength of mind and body are necessary, strength which in the last few months, has deteriorated in me to the extent that I have had to recognize my incapacity to adequately fulfill the ministry entrusted to me.*

*With regard to myself, I wish to also devotedly serve the Holy Church of God in the future through a life dedicated to prayer.”*

From the Vatican, 10 February 2013 ([Full text here](#))



Archbishop Emeritus of Baltimore Cardinal Edwin O’Brien and his priest-secretary Msgr. Adam Parker witnessed the historic announcement from Pope Benedict XVI: This photo was taken by Msgr. Parker immediately following the announcement and published by The Catholic Review.

## **Reflections on Aging:**

I cannot imagine the anguish that the Holy Father Emeritus went through before reaching this monumental decision. He faithfully served his predecessor and saw how he suffered during the last years of his life, witnessing the harsh and debilitating effects of the Parkinson’s disease. To have the courage to take a stand,

unprecedented in recent history: To be able to say now is the time, enough is enough... In retrospect, this is inspiring and courageous. I applaud the Pope Emeritus for his decision. The Church has a 'new normal' which will allow future pontiffs to breathe more easily when their name is announced at conclaves.

One of the most prevalent fears of adulthood is the unknown health concerns which will affect each of us as the years go by. We all hope and pray to be able to enjoy our sunset years with the ability to get around without too much difficulty, to travel, to spend quality time with our grandchildren and family, and to enjoy the fruits of our years of labor.

This hope for the future is not the reality for so many of our seniors who find themselves stricken with illnesses, many with increasingly limited mobility, and, of course, those waning levels of energy. Aging is not easy. And aging gracefully is not enjoyed by everyone. One's health dictates the possibilities for day to day living. Since we are not given a looking glass, many people wonder what that future will look like. Tough decisions are often part of the process. I feel certain that many of the aged in our families and communities understood the concerns that the Holy Father Emeritus felt as he shared his decision to step aside last year and begin a life of prayer for the world and the Church. Picturing him playing the piano, reading, and offering prayer in the Mater Ecclesiae Chapel brings a smile to my face.

### **Pope Francis and the 2014 World Day of the Sick:**

Pope Francis marked today's observation with his morning tweet:

*I greet all those who are sick and suffering. Christ Crucified is with you; cling to him! @Pontifex*

In his first message for this annual event the Holy Father commended this day to the intercession of the Blessed Mother so that "she will help sick people to live their own suffering in communion with Jesus Christ." Read the full message from Pope Francis [here](#).

## **Prayers for the sick and for their caregivers:**

### **Prayer for the Sick:**

*God of hope and healing,*

*Be with those whose bodies*

*burn with fever,*

*rage with pain,*

*struggle for breath,*

*cry out for limbs that used to be,*

*or crave addictive substances.*

*Be with those whose minds and emotions*

*face the wait of a diagnosis,*

*wrestle with the choices for treatment,*

*adapt to a life altered by chronic illness,*

*recover from abuse,*

*or push against the encroaching clouds of dementia.*

*Be with those whose spirits*

*are exhausted by the quest for health,*

*doubt the existence of love,*

*question the fairness of life,*

*or stare into the face of death.*

*Cool the fever,*

*bring balm to the pain,*

*ease the fight for air,*

*adapt the body for new ways to move,*

*and calm the cravings.*

*Ease anxiety and fear.*

*Build trust in your everlasting love and care.*

*God of all, hear our prayer.*

*Amen.*

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**Prayer for the Caregiver:**

*God of comfort and strength,*

*Be with those*

*whose backs ache with the weight of lifting,*

*whose hands are raw from the constant washing,*

*whose eyes close frequently from lack of sleep,*

*and whose bodies feel broken and weary.*

*Be with those*

*whose anxiety cannot face one more “what if,”*

*whose thoughts do not dare go beyond the next moment,*

*whose tears have flowed until there are no more,  
whose patience has worn too thin,  
and whose mind and emotions have become fragile.*

*Be with those whose spirits  
are exhausted by the demands of caring for the sick,  
doubt the existence of love,  
question the fairness of life,  
or stare into the reality of losing a loved one to death.*

*Sooth the body and ease the pain.*

*Calm the anxiety and fear.*

*Build trust in your everlasting presence and love.*

*God of all, hear our prayer.*

*Amen.*

**Today's prayers are taken from the National Association of Catholic Chaplains.**