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**Christ Shines Through the Sick, Says Pope  
Tells of Church's Closeness to the Suffering**

VATICAN CITY, FEB. 12, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- The countenance of Christ shines in the face of every sick person, says Benedict XVI.

This was the Pope's message to the ill on Sunday, as the Church observed World Day of the Sick. The Holy Father spoke at the end of the Mass for the sick, presided over by Cardinal Camillo Ruini, the vicar of Rome, in St. Peter's Basilica.

"In the face of every human being -- even more so if he is suffering and disfigured by illness -- shines the face of Christ, who said: 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me,'" Benedict XVI said.

The Pontiff said he wanted the day to express to all the sick the "material and spiritual closeness of the whole Christian community."

He added: "It is important not to leave [the sick] abandoned and alone, while they are having to face such a delicate moment of their lives. Therefore, those have great merit who, with patience and love, put their professional competence and human warmth at their service. "I am thinking of the doctors, nurses, health agents, volunteers, men and women religious, priests who look after them without reservations, as the Good Samaritan, not paying attention to their social condition, the color of their skin or their religious affiliation, but only to that which they need."

After the Mass, a procession with candles was held in St. Peter's Square as night fell, reminiscent of the atmosphere in Lourdes (France).

At the end of his address the Pope referred to "the grotto of Massabielle, where human suffering and hope, fear and confidence are found."

"How many pilgrims, consoled by the Mother's gaze, find in Lourdes the strength to comply more easily with the will of God, also when it means renunciation and pain," the Holy Father said.

The annual World Day of the Sick is celebrated each Feb. 11, feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Benedict XVI continued: "May the lighted candle you carry in your hands be the sign of a sincere desire to walk with Jesus, radiance of peace that illuminates the darkness and leads us to be light and support to those who live next to us.

"May no one who is in situations of harsh suffering ever feel alone or abandoned."