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To the Sisters Hospitallers of Mercy: before the frailty of illness, there can be no distinctions of social status, race or culture

The Holy Father received the Sisters Hospitallers of Mercy in audience this morning within the context of the Jubilee. To the 130 women religious present in the Clementine Hall and their superior Mother Paola Iacovone, who dedicate themselves principally to the care of hospital patients, the Pope expressed his gratitude for their fidelity to the original charism of the order and their attention to the new forms of poverty in our times.

The founder of the Congregation was the Servant of God Teresa Orsini Doria Pamphili Landi (1788-1829), an Italian of noble birth who, assisted by two priests, allowed herself to be guided by Jesus' words: "I was sick and you visited me", since "before the frailty of illness, there can be no distinctions of social status, race, language and culture: we all become weak and must entrust ourselves to others".

"The Church views closeness to those who suffer as her task and her responsibility, so as to bring them consolation, comfort and friendship", said the Pope. "You dedicate your life above all to the service of brothers and sisters who are hospitalised, so that thanks to your presence and professionalism they feel better supported during their illness. And to do this, there is no need for long speeches: a caress, a kiss, staying close to someone in silence, a smile. Never give up in this service, which is so valuable, despite all the difficulties you may encounter. At times, in our days, a secular culture aims to remove all religious reference from hospitals, starting from the very presence of women religious. When this happens, though, it is accompanied not infrequently by a painful lack of humanity, truly strident in places of suffering. Never tire of being friends, sisters and mothers to the sick; may prayer always be the vital lymph that supports your evangelising mission".

"When you are close to every ailing person, keep in your heart the peace and the joy that are the fruit of the Holy Spirit. On that hospital bed there always lies Jesus, present in the person who suffers, and it is He Who asks for help from each one of you. It is Jesus. At times one might think, "Some patients are bothersome". But we too are bothersome to the Lord, and He supports us and accompanies us! May closeness to Jesus and to the weakness be your strength. The fourth vow that characterises you as a religious family is more valid than ever, especially because there is an increasing number of people without a family, without a home, without a homeland and in need of welcome. By living this special vow consistently, you assume in yourselves the sentiments of Christ, Who 'though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor'. May the Holy Mother of Mercy accompany you always, and support you in your daily service to the weakest. I offer you my heartfelt blessing and ask you,

please, to pray for me. Thank you”.

At the end of the audience the Pope asked the Mother Superior to join him in consecrating the Institute to the Mother of Mercy.
