



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II FOR LENT 1984

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How many times have we read and listened to the awesome text from Chapter 25 of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew: "When the Son of man comes in his glory..., he will say... 'Come O blessed of my Father... for I was hungry and you gave me food...'"!

Yes, the Redeemer of the world experiences the hungers of all his hungry brothers and sisters. He suffers with those who cannot feed their bodies: all those peoples that are victims of drought or unfavourable economic conditions, all those families affected by unemployment or scarcity of work. And yet our earth can and must feed all its inhabitants, from the youngest children to the aged, and including all the categories of those who work.

Christ also suffers with those who rightly hunger for justice and for respect for their human dignity; he suffers with those who are deprived of their fundamental liberties, with those who are neglected or, worse still, exploited in their state of poverty.

Christ suffers with those who yearn for an equitable and universal peace, while this peace is being destroyed or threatened by so many conflicts and by a senseless and excessive build-up of arms. Can we be allowed to forget that the world is meant to be built, not destroyed?

In a word, Christ suffers with all the victims of material, moral and spiritual poverty.

"I was hungry and you gave me food..., I was a stranger and you welcomed me..., I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (*Mt 25:35-36*). It is to each one of us that these words will be addressed at the Day of Judgment. But they already challenge us and judge us.

Giving from our surplus and even from what we need for ourselves is not always a spontaneous reaction of our nature. It is precisely for this reason that we must constantly cast a fraternal glance at our fellow human beings and their lives; it is precisely for this reason that we stimulate within ourselves this hunger and thirst for sharing, for justice and for peace, so that we shall really undertake deeds that will help to assist individuals and peoples that are hard pressed.

Dear brothers and sisters, at this season of Lent in the Jubilee Year of Redemption, let us be more deeply converted; let us be more sincerely reconciled with God and with our neighbour. Then this spirit of penance, sharing and fasting will be translated into real action, which your local Churches will certainly urge upon you.

“Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver”. This exhortation of Saint Paul to the Corinthians is extremely relevant today (*2 Cor 9:7*). May you be enabled to feel the deep joy that comes from sharing food, from giving a welcome to a stranger, from assisting in the human advancement of the poor, from obtaining work for the unemployed, from the honest and courageous exercise of your civic, social and professional responsibilities, from the peace experienced in your homes and in all your relationships with others! All of this reflects the Love of God, to which we must be converted. Love inseparable from the so often urgent service of our neighbour. Let us desire, and let us deserve, to hear Christ tell us at the last day that inasmuch as we did good to one of the least of his brethren we did it to him!

JOHN PAUL II