



# The Holy See

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## **MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II FOR LENT 1988**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

In a spirit of joy and hope, I wish through this Lenten Message to exhort you to do penance, such as will bring you the abundant spiritual fruits of a more dynamic Christian life and a truly effective charity.

Lent is a period which profoundly affects the life of every Christian community; it fosters a spirit of recollection, prayer and attentiveness to the Word of God; it encourages us to respond generously to the Lord's call as expressed in the words of the Prophet: "Is not this the fast that I choose... to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house? ... Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say: 'Here I am'" (*Is 58:6,7,9*).

Lent 1988 occurs during the Marian Year, on the eve of the Third Millennium of the birth of Jesus, our Saviour. Contemplating the divine motherhood of Mary, the woman who bore the Son of God within her womb and surrounded the child Jesus with special care and love, I am reminded of the painful drama of so many mothers, whose hope and joy has been shattered by the early deaths of their children.

Yes, my Brothers and Sisters, I ask you to think of this scandal of infant mortality, which claims tens of thousands of victims every day. Children are dying before their birth; others have only a brief and painful existence which is cut short by diseases that could easily be prevented.

It has been clearly demonstrated that in the most severely poverty-stricken countries of the world it is the children who have the highest death rate due to acute dehydration, parasites, polluted water, hunger, lack of vaccination against epidemics, and even the lack of love. Under conditions of such poverty, a great many children die in their infancy, while the physical and psychological development of others is so seriously affected that their very survival is threatened, and they are at

a disadvantage in finding a place for themselves in society.

The victims of this tragedy are the children, who are born in a state of poverty which too often stems from social injustices, as well as their families, who do not have the resources they need and who are wounded forever by the early deaths of their children.

Recall with what determination our Lord Jesus demonstrated his solidarity with children: he called a small child to himself, set him in their midst and declared: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me", and he commanded: "Let the children come to me" (Mt 18:2, 5; 19:4).

I strongly urge you, in this liturgical period of Lent, to allow the Spirit of God to take hold of you, to break the chains of selfishness and sin. In a spirit of solidarity, share with those who have fewer resources than yourselves. Give, not only the things you can spare, but the things you may perhaps need, in order to lend your generous support to the actions and projects of your local Church, especially to ensure a just future for children who are least protected.

By so doing, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, your charity will shine forth, and people will "see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16).

During Lent, following the example of Mary who faithfully accompanied her Son to the Cross, may our faithfulness to our Lord and our generous deeds bear witness to our obedience to his commandment!

With all my heart, I bless you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**JOHN PAUL II**