



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II FOR LENT 1993

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the holy season of Lent, the Church sets out once again on the path leading to Easter. With Jesus as her guide, and walking in his footsteps, she invites us to cross the desert.

The history of salvation has given the desert a profound religious meaning. Under the leadership of Moses and later, enlightened by other Prophets, the Chosen People were able, amid privations and sufferings, to experience God's faithful presence and his mercy. They fed upon the bread which came down from heaven and quenched their thirst with the water which sprang from the rock. The People of God grew in faith and in hope for the coming of the Messiah who would redeem them.

It was also in the desert that John the Baptist preached, and the crowds came to him in order to receive in the waters of the Jordan the baptism of repentance. The desert was the place for a conversion aimed at welcoming the One who comes to triumph over the sorrow and death which are the wages of sin. Jesus, the Messiah of the poor whom he fills with good things (cf. *Lk 1:53*), began his mission by becoming like those who are hungry and thirsty in the desert.

Dear brothers and sisters, I invite you during this Lent to meditate upon the word of life which Christ left to his Church in order to enlighten the journey of each of her members. Recognize the voice of Jesus who speaks to you, especially during this Lenten season, in the Gospel, in the liturgical celebrations, in the exhortations of your pastors. Listen to the voice of Jesus who, tired and thirsty, says to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: "Give me a drink" (*Jn 4:7*). Look upon Jesus nailed to the Cross, dying, and listen to his faint voice: "I thirst" (*Jn 19:28*). Today, Christ repeats his request and relives the torments of his Passion in the poorest of our brothers and sisters.

By inviting us through the discipline of Lent to tread the paths of love and hope marked out by Christ, the Church makes us realize that the Christian life involves detachment from superfluous goods, and the acceptance of a poverty which sets us free, and enables us to discover God's presence and to welcome our brothers and sisters with an ever more active solidarity and in an ever wider fellowship.

Call to mind, then, the Lord's words: "Whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward" (*Mt 10:42*). Take to heart and find hope in these other words: "Come blessed of my Father,... for I was thirsty and you gave me to drink" (*Mt 25:34-35*).

2. During Lent of 1993, in order to practise in a concrete way the solidarity and fraternal charity associated with the spiritual quest of this special season of the year, I ask the members of the Church to remember particularly the men and women suffering the tragic desertification of their lands, and those who in too many parts of the world are lacking that basic yet vital good which is water.

Today we are concerned to see the desert expanding to lands which only yesterday were prosperous and fertile. We cannot forget that in many cases man himself has been the cause of the barrenness of lands which have become desert, just as he has caused the pollution of formerly clean waters. When people do not respect the goods of the earth, when they abuse them, they act unjustly, even criminally, because for many of their brothers and sisters their actions result in poverty and death.

We are deeply worried to see that entire peoples, millions of human beings, have been reduced to destitution and are suffering from hunger and disease because they lack drinking water. In fact, hunger and many diseases are closely linked to drought and water pollution. In places where rain is rare or the sources of water dry up, life becomes more fragile; it fades away to the point of disappearing. Immense areas of Africa are experiencing this scourge, but it is also present in certain areas of Latin America and Australia.

Furthermore, it is quite clear to everyone that uncontrolled industrial development and the use of technologies which disrupt the balance of nature have caused serious damage to the environment and caused grave disasters. We are running the risk of leaving as our heritage to future generations the tragedy of thirst and desertification in many parts of the world.

I earnestly invite you to give generous support to the institutions, organizations and social agencies which are trying to help peoples suffering from shortages or drought and experiencing the difficulties of increasing desertification. I likewise urge you to cooperate with those engaged in scientific analysis of all the causes of desertification and in the quest for solutions to this problem.

May the active generosity of the sons and daughters of the Church, and of all men and women of good will, hasten the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah: "For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water" (*Is 35:6-7*)!

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

From the Vatican, September 18, 1992.

JOHN PAUL II

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