



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II FOR LENT 1982

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Who is my neighbour?” (*Lk 10:29*).

You will remember: it was with the parable of the Good Samaritan that Jesus answered this question posed by a lawyer who had just acknowledged what he read in the Law: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself”.

The Good Samaritan is in the first place Christ himself; he is the one who approached us first and made us his neighbour, so as to help us, to heal us and to save us: “He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (*Phil 2:7-8*).

If there is still some distance between God and ourselves, that can only be due to us and to the obstacles we place in the way of this coming close: the sin which is in our heart, the injustices that we commit, the hatred and divisions that we foster, everything that still prevents us from loving God with all our heart and our strength. The time of Lent is the special time for purification and penance, so as to allow our Saviour to make us his neighbour and save us by his love.

The second commandment is similar to the first (cf. *Mt 22:39*) and cannot be separated from it. We love others with that selfsame love which God puts into our hearts and with which he loves them. Here too, how many obstacles in the way of making others our neighbour: we do not love God and our neighbour enough. Why do we still have so many difficulties in leaving the important but insufficient stage of thought, declarations or protestations, in order to become truly immigrants with the immigrants, refugees with the refugees, and poor alongside those who lack everything?

The liturgical period of Lent is given us in and through the Church in order to purify us of that remainder of selfishness and excessive attachment to things – material or otherwise – which keep us apart from those who have a right to our help: principally those who, whether physically near or far, are unable to live their lives with dignity as men and women created by God in his image and likeness.

Allow yourselves, then, to be imbued by the spirit of penance and conversion, which is the spirit of love and sharing. Imitating Christ, draw close to those who have been left naked and wounded, those whom the world ignores or rejects. Take part in all that is being done in your local Church to help Christians and all people of good will to obtain for each one of their brothers and sisters the means, including the material means, of living with dignity and of taking upon themselves their own human and spiritual advancement and that of their families.

May the Lenten collection, even in poor countries, allow you, through sharing, to help the local Churches of still less favoured countries to fulfil their mission as Good Samaritans towards those for whom they are immediately responsible: their own poor, the undernourished, those who are denied justice, those who are still unable to ensure their own development and the development of their communities.

Penance, conversion: this is the road to follow; not a sad one, but a liberating one suggested by the Lenten period.

And if we still ask the question: “Who is my neighbour?”, we shall read the answer on the face of the Risen One, and hear it from his lips: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (*Mt 25:40*).

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