



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO A DELEGATION FROM ST. PETER'S CIRCLE

*Hall of the Popes
Friday, 24 February 2012*

Dear Members of St Peter's Circle,

I am happy to welcome you at this meeting which is taking place in the proximity of the Feast of the Chair of St Peter, an occasion which enables you to show the special fidelity to the Apostolic See which has always distinguished your praiseworthy Circle. I greet you all with warmth and cordiality. I greet the President General, Duke Leopoldo Torlonia, and thank him for his affectionate and devoted words to me, interpreting the sentiments of you all, and I greet your Chaplain.

We have just begun the Lenten journey and, as I recalled in my recent Message (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 8 February 2012, pp. 6-7), this liturgical time invites us to reflect on the heart of Christian life: charity. Lent is a favourable time for renewing our faith and love, with the help of the word of God and the sacraments, at both the personal and community levels. It is a journey marked by prayer and by sharing, by silence and by fasting, in the expectation of experiencing the joy of Easter. The Letter to the Hebrews exhorts us with these words: "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works" (10:24).

Dear friends, today as in the past, the witness of charity touches people's hearts in a special way; the New Evangelization, particularly in a cosmopolitan city like Rome, requires great openness of spirit and wise availability to all. The network of projects you carry out every day to assist those in need fits into this context well. I am pleased to recall the generous work you do in the Soup Kitchens, the Night Shelter, the Family House and the Polyfunctional Centre, as well as your witness — silent, but all the more eloquent — in support of the sick and their relatives at the Fondazione Roma Hospice, without forgetting your missionary commitment in Laos and your

distance adoptions.

We know that the authenticity of our fidelity to the Gospel is also proven by the consideration and material help we endeavour to show to our neighbour and, especially, to the weakest and most marginalized. Attention for the other entails seeking his/her good in every dimension: physical, moral and spiritual. Even though today's culture seems to have lost its sense of good and evil, it must be forcefully reaffirmed that good exists and wins through.

Responsibility for our neighbour therefore means desiring and doing good for others, in the hope that they may be opened to the logic of goodness; being concerned for our brothers and sisters means opening our eyes to their needs, overcoming hardness of heart which blinds us to the suffering of others. Thus charitable service becomes a privileged form of evangelization in the light of the teaching of Jesus, who will consider as done to him what we do for our brethren, especially for those who are lowly and neglected (cf. Mt 25:40).

It is necessary to attune our hearts to the heart of Christ, so that the loving support offered to others may be expressed in participation and conscious sharing in their suffering and their hopes, thereby making visible on the one hand the infinite mercy of God for every human being, which shines on Christ's face, and on the other, our faith in him. The encounter with the "other" and opening our hearts to his/her needs are an opportunity for salvation and happiness.

Dear members of St Peter's Circle, you have come here today, as you do every year, to offer me the Peter's Pence Collection for the Pope's charity that you have collected in the parishes of Rome. It is practical assistance offered to the Successor of Peter, to enable him to respond to the innumerable requests that come to him from every part of the world, especially from the poorest countries.

I warmly thank you for all the work you carry out so generously in a spirit of sacrifice that is born from your faith, from your relationship with the Lord, nurtured every day. May faith, charity and witness continue to be the guidelines of your apostolate.

Then how can I fail to mention your presence during the liturgical celebrations in St Peter's Basilica? This is especially to your credit, since with it you demonstrate the constant attention and devout fidelity that unite you with the See of the Apostle Peter. May the Lord reward you and bestow his blessing upon your Circle; may he help each one of you to fulfil your Christian vocation, in the family, at work and within your Association.

Dear friends, as I express my appreciation of your service to the Church once again, I entrust you, together with your families, to the motherly care of the Virgin Mary *Salus Populi Romani* and to your Holy Patrons. For my part, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer for you, for all those who support you in your various initiatives and for those whom you meet in your daily apostolate,

while I impart to everyone with affection a special Apostolic Blessing.

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