



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO JACQUES DIOUF
ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD FOOD DAY***

*To Mr Jacques Diouf
Director General of the Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*

On the occasion of the annual World Food Day I want to renew an appeal to the consciences and sense of solidarity of individuals and nations, while we realize that the tragic condition of more than 800 million starving and undernourished persons, of whom 200 million are children, is one of the most serious problems of our time.

The theme of this year's observance "*Fight Hunger to Reduce Poverty*", links the need to reduce poverty with the fight against hunger, one of the basic causes of poverty. Indeed, shortage of food seriously threatens life at its beginning and in its ongoing material and spiritual stages.

For this reason, on the occasion of the World Food Summit, held in Rome in 1996, in which I personally participated, the Heads of State and Government made a solemn commitment about the serious problems of supplying food. Now, five years later, the partial achievement of the initial goal set out, has led to the present need to organize a new Summit to influence the political will manifested then, and to muster the needed resources to cut in half the number of people who suffer hunger, at the latest, by 2015.

I wish to encourage those who are called to guide the destiny of Nations, to work to achieve this noble undertaking, which one has to regard as humanly indispensable and religiously praiseworthy.

The "Our Father", the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples (cf. Mt 6, 9-13; Lk 11, 2-4), can offer to all believers important points for reflection and valid motives to inspire action, without harm to anyone's religious identity.

In fact, the prayer for bread, at the centre of the Lord's Prayer, creates a double goal since it joins two features of the prayer: first, the prayer for the full achievement of the divine plan for humanity, and second, the prayer for what the human being who tends towards God needs for his life.

The "Our Father" is revealed as the prayer of brothers and sisters who are aware that they cannot reach God alone and so trust that they will meet Him together by living in communion. The prayer invites us to discern the face of God in our neighbours, for whom each of us must take responsibility, especially for those who are weaker and lacking in daily food. Jesus himself said: "As long as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25,40).

After the tragic terrorist attacks on the United States that seriously wounded peace and social cohesion among peoples, we are now forced to take more seriously the presence of the Lord in the poor and starving and to motivate people to come to the aid of the poor.

Renewed spiritual and religious motivation will have a greater impact on World Food Day, persuading government leaders and men of good will to respond adequately to the call for justice raised by the victims of the scourge of hunger, so that all will offer help in accord with their resources.

I hope that believers will be among the first to work for justice and solidarity, speedily setting up important ways to bring about cooperation. If they listen to the cry of the poor, as they observe World Food Day, they will know how to obtain concrete action from the leaders of their Nations, and how to be involved themselves in prayer and deeds so that the important "World Food Summit Five Years Later" may produce the fruits hoped for.

In offering you, Mr General Director, my cordial wishes for the success of the Day, I ask the blessing of God on your noble mission.

From the Vatican, 16 October 2001

JOHN PAUL II

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