



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II FOR THE BRAZIL'S LENTEN "CAMPAIGN OF FRATERNITY 2004"

To my Venerable Brother in the Episcopate

Archbishop Geraldo Majella Agnelo of São Salvador

President of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops and Primate of Brazil On the occasion of the Brotherhood Campaign that the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil has been promoting for 40 years, I would like to express my pleasure at this opportunity to speak to all the faithful united in Christ, with the renewed hope of conversion and reconciliation that Lent inspires in us in preparation for Easter. It is a season in which every Christian is especially invited to reflect on the various social situations among the Brazilian people that require greater brotherhood. This year the theme chosen is: "*Water, a source of life*". As everyone knows, water is immensely important for the earth: without this precious element, it would rapidly become an arid desert, a place of hunger and thirst where people, animals and plants would be condemned to death. In addition to being a condition for life on earth, water also has the power to cleanse and purify, washing away impurities. For this very reason, in the Sacred Scriptures water is considered the symbol of moral purification: God "washes" away all the sinner's wickedness (cf. Ps 50: 4). At the Last Supper, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples; and in response to Peter's protests, Jesus says: "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me" (Jn 13: 8). It is in Christian Baptism, however, that water acquires its full spiritual significance as a source of supernatural life, as Christ himself proclaims in the Gospel: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (Jn 3: 5). Baptism is therefore established as the way to life with God. The neophyte, moved by the action of grace of the Spirit, receives participation in the new life in Christ (cf. Gal 3: 27-28). Having become a new creature, the baptized person can and must make his relations with his peers and with all creation conform to justice, to charity and to the responsibility that God entrusted to human care (cf. Gn 2: 15). This gives rise to concrete obligations in the area of ecology for every individual. Fulfilment of these obligations presupposes an openness to a spiritual and ethical perspective capable of overcoming the selfish attitudes and lifestyles which lead to the depletion of natural resources. As a gift from God, water is a vital element essential to survival; thus, everyone has a right to it. Attention must be paid to the problems that derive from its scarcity, which is evident not only in Brazil but also in many parts of the world. Water is not an unlimited resource. Its rational use in solidarity demands the collaboration of all people of good will with the Government Institutions so as to ensure the effective protection of the environment, understood as a gift from God (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, n. 25). This is a question, therefore, that must be set in context in order to establish moral criteria based precisely on the value of life and the respect for the rights and dignity of all human beings. In opening the Brotherhood Campaign of 2004, I renew the hope that the various bodies of civil society,

joined by the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil and the other Churches as well as by the religious and non-religious Organizations, may indeed guarantee that water remain an abundant source of life for one and all. With these hopes, I invoke the protection of the Lord, giver of all good things, that he may stretch out his beneficent hand over the fields, lakes and rivers of this Land of the Holy Cross, pouring out his gifts of peace and prosperity in abundance. With his grace, may sentiments of brotherhood and lively cooperation be reawakened in every heart. With my special Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, 19 January 2004* **JOHN PAUL II**

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