



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI FOR LENT 1973

Dear Sons and Daughters in Jesus Christ, Lent is a time of self-denial and penance; but it is also a time of fellowship and solidarity. Need we say anything more to underline the importance of Lent? Let us listen to the exhortations uttered through the Prophet Isaiah and contained in the Liturgy of Lent: "This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: ... sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own»" (*Is 58:6,7*; First Reading for the Friday after Ash Wednesday). These exhortations echo the anxieties of the people of today. Each individual truly shares in the sufferings and misery of all. Alms-giving and the gift of self should not be isolated and occasional acts, but the expression of brotherly union. Our age is deeply aware of the need to take collective responsibility for the evils that weigh upon mankind. Only by response to this need can these evils be overcome. Lent puts the faithful on their guard against every form of waste, and urges them to make a united effort. The restoration of all things in Christ is closely connected with the Lenten spirit. Jesus himself will one day reveal to us the importance of the help we once gave to our brothers and sisters: "For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; ... naked and you clothed me" (*Mt 25:35-36*). The appeal of Christ in his members concerns every Christian. No one can disregard the urgent pleading of his divine Brother. Experience shows that Christian communities which have the greatest needs are far from being the least sensitive to the needs of others. Yes, here and now we meet the needy Christ in the people around us, and this meeting cannot leave us indifferent. But one of the signs of our time is the widespread awareness of the afflictions that lie heavy upon mankind. Many obstacles in many places hinder the promotion of the human dignity of every individual. We have dedicated several documents to a detailed study of this problem. But our purpose today is to encourage commitment and direct action for its solution. In many countries Lent is the occasion for organized action by the Church. She asks every individual to make a material contribution towards the complete development of all. Providing the means needed for this development is an important work, and we hope that such efforts will be intensified, in a spirit of genuine sharing. Considerable sums of money are needed for various programmes and projects and the amount required can only be obtained if each individual makes his contribution. Each person is asked to give according to his means, and to make a real effort in his giving. By preaching these needs during Lent, the Church wishes to underline their religious aspect. One can give without really communicating, one can contribute without really sharing, one can deprive oneself of things without really having a spirit of poverty. But the person who makes a real effort, the person who genuinely seeks to help his brothers and sisters, the person who accepts his share of the Cross of Christ does not run this risk. If Lent is inspired by the charity of the Gospel and if it leads to practical action, material assistance will be ensured. Above all, Lent will bring about an increase of brotherhood, of justice, of happiness and of love. It will bring us true joy at the Resurrection of the Lord. In the name of

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