



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II FOR LENT 1985

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Again this year at this time of Lent, I wish to speak to you about the distressing situation created by hunger in the world. When hundreds of millions of people are lacking food, when millions of children are irreparably marked by hunger for the rest of their lives and thousands of them are dying of it, I cannot remain silent, we cannot remain silent or inactive.

We know that governments as well as international organisations and associations send much relief to the victims of these food shortages, unfortunately without all of them receiving what could save them. But, in order to be effective, could not a very significant effort be made to attack even more decisively the causes of this scourge which rages on a worldwide scale?

It is true that natural causes such as bad weather and long periods of drought are unavoidable at the present time. But their consequences would often be less serious if people would not add mistakes and sometimes injustices to these natural causes. Is everything being done to prevent, at least in part, the disastrous effects of bad weather, as well as to ensure the just and rapid distribution of provisions and assistance? On the other hand, there are situations which are intolerable: I am thinking of those farmers who do not receive just compensation for their hard work; I am also thinking of those rural people who have been cast out from their productive lands by individuals or groups, already abundantly provided for, who amass wealth at the expense of the hunger and suffering of others. And how many other causes and situations of hunger could be quoted!

Within the same family, can some members eat their fill while their brothers and sisters are excluded from the table? To think of those who suffer is not enough. In this time of Lent, conversion of heart calls us to add fasting to our prayer, and to fill with God's love the efforts that the demands of justice towards neighbour inspire us to make.

“I have compassion on the crowd” (*Mk 8:2*), said Jesus before multiplying the bread to feed those who had been following him for three days so as to listen to his word. Physical hunger is not the only kind from which humanity suffers: many of our brothers and sisters are also hungry and thirsty for dignity, freedom, justice, for food for their minds and souls; there are deserts of the spirit and the heart!

How are we to show in a concrete way our conversion and our spirit of penance at this time of preparation for Easter?

First of all, to the extent of our sometimes great responsibilities, by not cooperating in any way with anything that could cause hunger to even one of our brothers and sisters in the world, be he or she near or thousands of kilometers from us; and if we have done so, by making amends.

In the countries which are suffering from hunger and thirst, Christians are sharing in the urgent help being given and in the fight against the causes of this catastrophe of which they are the victims just like their fellow-citizens. Let us assist them by sharing with them our surpluses and even what we need, for this is the true practice of fasting. Let us take part generously in the concerted actions of our local Churches.

Let us always remember that to share is to give to others what God intends for them and which is only entrusted to us. To give fraternally by allowing ourselves to be inspired by the love that comes from God is to contribute to alleviating physical hunger, to nourishing people’s minds and to gladdening their hearts.

“Let all that you do be done in love... The grace of the Lord Jesus will be with you” (*1 Cor 16:14, 23*).

JOHN PAUL II