



# The Holy See

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## **MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II FOR LENT 1990**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

1. Each year the approach of Lent affords me the opportunity to invite you to make good use of this favourable moment, this “day of salvation” (cf. *2 Cor 6:2*), so that it may be lived intensely both as a time of conversion to God and of love for our brothers and sisters. Lent calls us to a complete change of mind and heart in order that we may hear the Lord’s voice inviting us to turn to him in newness of life and to make ourselves ever more sensitive to the sufferings of those around us.

This year, I wish to emphasize the problem of refugees and make it the subject of our common reflection. The enormous and increasing flow of refugees is a painful reality which no longer touches only certain regions of the world, but extends to every continent.

As people without a homeland, refugees seek a welcome in other countries of the world, which is our common home. Only a few of them are allowed to re-enter their countries of origin because of changed circumstances within those countries. For the rest, the very painful experience of flight, insecurity and anxious search for an appropriate place to settle continues. Among them are children, women – some of them widows – families that often are split apart, young people whose hopes have been frustrated, and adults uprooted from their work and deprived of all their material possessions, their homes and their homeland.

2. Considering the extent and the seriousness of the problem, all the Church’s members must be sensitive to this appeal, inasmuch as they are followers of Jesus – who himself experienced the condition of a refugee – and bearers of the Good News. Christ himself, in the moving Gospel passage read in the Latin Church on Monday of the First Week of Lent, wishes to be identified and recognized in every refugee: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me... I was a stranger and you did *not* welcome me” (*Mt 25:35, 43*).

These words of Christ must lead us to a careful examination of conscience with regard to our attitude toward exiles and refugees. We find them every day in so many of our parishes. In fact, for many of us, they have become next-door neighbours who are in need of charity, justice and solidarity from all Christians.

3. For this reason, I address to you, the individual members and communities of the Catholic Church, this urgent Lenten exhortation: seek to help our brother and sister refugees in every possible way by providing a welcome that will lead to their full participation in the everyday life of society. Show them an open mind and a warm heart.

Concern for refugees must lead us to reaffirm and highlight universally recognized human rights, and to ask that the effective recognition of these rights be guaranteed to refugees. For the presentation, on 3 June 1986, of the John XXIII International Peace Prize to Thailand's Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR), I recalled that already in the Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* Pope John had emphasized the urgent need to recognize the rights of refugees precisely because they are persons. I stated that "it is our obligation always to guarantee these inalienable rights, which are inherent in every human being and do not depend on prevailing conditions or socio-political situations" (*Insegnamenti* IX, 1, 1986, p. 1751). Thus it is a matter of guaranteeing to refugees the right to establish a family or to be reunited with their families: to have a stable, dignified occupation and a just wage; to live in dwellings fit for human beings; to receive adequate health care – in a word, all those rights solemnly sanctioned since 1951 in the Convention of the United Nations on the Statute for Refugees, and confirmed in the 1967 Protocol on the same Statute.

4. I am well aware that in the face of this grave problem, international organisations, Catholic organisations, and movements of various types have worked intensely, with the support and collaboration of many people, to provide adequate social programmes. I thank them and encourage them to show even greater concern, since it is clear that although much has been done, it is still not enough. The number of refugees is growing, and the resources for receiving and assisting them often prove to be inadequate.

Our first commitment should be to take part in charitable initiatives, to animate and support them through our testimony of love, so that in every country they may have an impact on the processes of educating children and young people in particular, in mutual respect, tolerance and a spirit of service at every level, both in private and public life. In this way many problems will be more easily overcome.

5. I also address myself to you, my dear brothers and sisters who are refugees: live united in your faith in God, in mutual charity and in undaunted hope. All the world knows your problems, and the Church is near to you with the help that her members are working to provide, even though they realize that it is insufficient. In order to alleviate your sufferings, good will and understanding on

your part are also necessary. You are rich in your own civilization, culture, traditions and human and spiritual values. From these you can draw the ability and the strength to begin a new life. As much as possible, you too must help and assist one another in the places where you are temporarily being hosted.

We who are Catholics will accompany you and support you on your way, as we recognize in each one of you the face of Christ, the Exile and Refugee, who said: “ Insofar as you did it to one of the least of these brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did it to me” (*Mt 25:40*).

6. At the beginning of Lent, I invoke the fullness of grace and light that flow from the redeeming mystery of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, so that every individual and all ecclesial groups and religious communities within the Church may find the inspiration and energy needed for practical works of solidarity on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are exiles and refugees. In this way, comforted by the loving support and interest of others, refugees may recover joy and hope in order to continue along their difficult path.

May my blessing bring forth an abundance of the Lord’s gifts upon those who will respond to this pressing appeal.

**JOHN PAUL II**

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