



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF PAUL VI
TO THE STUDENTS OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Wednesday, 24 February 1971

Dear children,

This is the Holy Father speaking to you from the Vatican on the first day of Lent. Each year at the beginning of this liturgical season of self-denial and sacrifice in preparation for Easter, it is Our custom to remind you of the millions of hungry, sick and needy children around the world. Their only source of aid and comfort is very often that which is made possible because of your annual donations to the American Bishops' Overseas Aid Fund.

These boys and girls live in the poorest and neediest countries of the world, where they have none of the comforts and advantages that you know and can enjoy in your own prosperous country. Very often there are no schools where they can learn to read and write, no doctors to treat them when they are sick and not enough food to build their little bodies. In some of these countries today the misery of the children who live there is made even worse by disasters such as floods and earthquakes, by famine and by the awful ravages of war.

During the past year alone, We have witnessed the tragic earthquake in Peru which left thousands of persons homeless. We have seen the even more terrible disaster that happened in Pakistan and brought untold suffering to the people of that country. The dread disease of cholera spreads in Africa and other countries, further afflicting bodies already weakened by hunger. The continuing conflict in the Middle East-where so many children have never known anything except canvas tents in miserable refugee camps as their homes-deprives young and old of their daily food and of normal living and drains them of all hope for the future. Because peace has not yet come to Vietnam, proper schooling and the normal joys of childhood are impossible.

But We see each year, each month, each day, the persistent charitable work of the dedicated people of Catholic Relief Services, who bring aid and hope to millions of needy persons inhabiting the so-called Third World.

This meritorious work is supported and maintained by your Bishops' Overseas Aid Fund and it is your generosity that makes so many of these acts of mercy a reality. We can point with pride to organizations like Catholic Relief Services, because they carry out the teachings of Our Blessed Lord by practising Christian love. Your concern and your love for your less fortunate brothers and sisters are the embodiment of his message of charity and peace.

Your little sacrifices become a mighty weapon against the misery and despair of suffering people. Your response in the past has enabled Catholic Relief Services to be present with food, clothing, medical care and new homes for those displaced by the disasters in Peru and Pakistan; it enabled Catholic Relief Services to rush medical supplies, blankets and food to those who were injured or made homeless during the civil war in Jordan. Every day in Vietnam, this organization provides help to refugees, orphans and other innocent victims of the war, It is present in more than seventy countries, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, sheltering the homeless, ransoming the captive and giving drink to the thirsty. This is God's work. We know that you will want to be part of it again.

In making Lenten sacrifices for this important purpose you will be performing an act of Christian charity and fulfilling the words of Our Blessed Lord who said: "As long as you did it for one of my least brothers you did it for me".

It is in his name that We impart to you, dear boys and girls, to your good parents, your teachers, the priests and religious of your parish, and to your friends Our affectionate Apostolic Blessing.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.