

Pontiff's Easter plea: End conflict, poverty

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — In his Easter message to the world, Pope John Paul II called for an end to ethnic conflicts in Eastern Europe and to indifference to the plight of those suffering throughout the world.

"I wish you peace, real peace: the peace yearned for by the heart of every human being," the pope said in his April 19 *Urbi et Orbi* ("To the city and to the world") message.

In other activities during the Easter period, Pope John Paul heard confessions in St. Peter's Basilica, baptized an international array of catechumens, and celebrated the Stations of the Cross at Rome's ancient Colosseum.

An estimated 100,000 people gathered for the midday Easter blessing in St. Peter's Square, which was emblazoned with 15,000 white, yellow and red tulips from Holland.

The pope prayed that his Easter wish of peace would reach the world's victims of war, especially in the former Yugoslavian republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Nagorno-Karabakh, formerly part of the Soviet Union.

The pope's celebration of Christ's victory over sin and death included hearing confessions for about 80 minutes in the basilica on Good Friday, April 17.

Seventeen people received the sacrament from the pope. The youngest was a 9-year-old Roman girl. An Italian newspaper said it was her first confession.

During the Easter vigil Mass April 18, the pope baptized and confirmed 29 catechumens from 13 countries. Among the new Catholics — whose ages ranged from 9 to 47 — was Robert Ratner, a 21-year-old American. Later in the Mass, the 29 received their first Communion from the pope.

In his *Urbi et Orbi* address, the pope said Jesus sent his disciples to tell the whole world that he died and rose again for their sins.

Following Christ's call, missionaries brought the Good News to the peoples of the Americas 500 years ago, he said.

"Could Christ's disciples have failed to go to them with the Gospel?" he asked. "What other truth could there

be greater than this one, that Christ died for the sins of all?"

To the nations of Europe, he said, "listen, I beg you, to the voice of the One who has worked in you with great power. He urges you not to be afraid. He exhorts you to make the old continent into a new reality in which difference does not mean opposition and clashes, but mutual enrichment in complementarity and exchange."

The pope asked the peoples of the Middle East to use their "wealth of age-old human and religious traditions" to strengthen dialogue aimed at resolving the regions' conflicts.

"May the Risen Christ's proclamation of peace likewise resound in Latin America where the hard-won armistice achieved in El Salvador is contrasted by the tensions and the unstable situation being experienced in Peru," he said.

The pope also prayed for an end to indifference and silence regarding "the anguished cry of the poor," especially in Africa, where persistent famine, poverty and disease continue to cause suffering.

The *Urbi et Orbi* message was carried by television stations in 55 countries. After the address, the pope gave his Easter greetings in 56 languages.

To English speakers he wished: "A blessed Easter in the joy of Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord and Savior of the world."

"The cross of Christ remains in human history as the sign of the love that takes away sins," Pope John Paul said late April 17 after celebrating the Stations of the Cross at the rain-washed, torch-lighted Colosseum.

The Colosseum, an open-air arena associated with early Christian martyrdom, is a symbol of an immense void only God can fill, the pope said.

"Inside this space are all those who in different ways share in the sufferings of Christ. They look upon the cross, perhaps without even knowing that they are embraced by the same mystery of redeeming love, a love that knows no limits."

The 14 Stations of the Cross — recalling Gospel events from Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Olives to his burial in the tomb — included meditations written by Archbishop Miloslav Vlk of Prague, Czechoslovakia. The



AP/Wide World Photos

Pope John Paul II stoops to kiss the foot of one 12 priests April 16, during a re-enactment of the Last Supper in Rome. The pope, representing Jesus, annually bathes and kisses the feet of priests, standing in for the Apostles, as a reminder of Christ's example of humility.

meditations focused on Christ's total obedience to God and "the new culture of love and service" which he gave as an example to his followers.

On Holy Thursday, the pope was joined by cardinals, bishops and priests for the Chrism Mass at which the oils used in baptisms, confirmations and the anointing of the sick are blessed.

That evening, Pope John Paul, who is also bishop of Rome, went to his diocesan cathedral, the Basilica of St. John Lateran, to celebrate the Mass

commemorating the Last Supper. He washed the feet of 12 elderly priests from the Rome diocese.

"Offering his body and spilling his blood was the supreme testimony of the love of Christ who, in dying for us, gave us the possibility to live for him and for the Father," the pope said.

At the pope's request, the collection taken during the Mass was earmarked to aid poor children in Haiti.

The pope spent Easter Monday at the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome.

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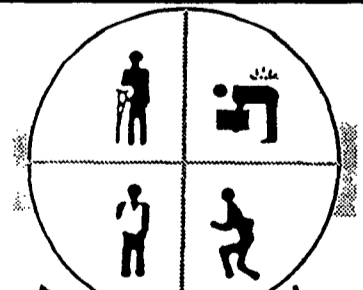
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