

# Pope calls on world to intensify efforts for peace

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ample, of the tragic situations in certain countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. There exist vast groups, often whole sectors of the population, which find themselves on the margins of civil life within their own countries. Among them is a growing number of children who in order to survive can rely on nobody except themselves. Such a situation is not only an affront to human dignity but also represents a clear threat to peace. A state, whatever its political organization or economic system, remains fragile and unstable if it does not give constant attention to its weakest members and if it fails to do everything possible to ensure that at least their primary needs are satisfied.

The poorest countries' right to development imposes upon the developed countries a clear duty to come to their aid. The Second Vatican Council said in this regard: "Everyone has the right to have a part of the earth's goods that is sufficient for each and his or her dependents ... We are obliged to support the poor, and not just from our surplus" ("*Gaudium et Spes*," 69). The church's admonition is clear, and it is a faithful echo of the voice of Christ: earthly goods are meant for the whole human family and cannot be reserved for the exclusive benefit of a few (cf. "*Centesimus Annus*," 31 and 37).

In the interest of the individual — and thus of peace — it is therefore urgently necessary to introduce into the mechanisms of the economy the necessary correctives which will enable those mechanisms to ensure and more just and equitable distribution of goods. By itself the rules of the market are not sufficient to accomplish this; society must accept its own responsibilities (cf. *ibid.*, 48). It must do so by increasing its efforts, which are often already considerable, to eliminate the causes of poverty and their tragic consequences ...

All individuals and social groups have a right to live in conditions which enable them to provide for personal and family needs and to share in the

life and progress of the local community. When this right is not recognized, it easily happens that the people concerned feel that they are victims of a structure which does not welcome them, and they react strongly. This is especially the case with young people, who, being deprived of adequate education and employment opportunities, are most exposed to the risk of being marginalized and exploited. Everybody is aware of the worldwide problem of unemployment, especially among the young, with the consequent impoverishment of an ever greater number of individuals and whole families. Moreover, unemployment is often the tragic result of the destruction of the economic infrastructure of a country affected by war or internal conflicts ...

Another grave problem is drugs. Sadly and tragically, everyone knows of their connection with violence and crime. Similarly, everyone knows that in some parts of the world, because of pressure from drug traffickers, it is precisely the very poor who cultivate the plants for drug production. The lavish profits promised — which in fact represent only a tiny part of the profits derived from their cultivation — are a temptation difficult to resist by those who gain a markedly insufficient income from the production of traditional crops. The first thing to be done in order to help growers to overcome this situation is therefore to offer them adequate means to escape from their poverty ...

Destitution therefore is a hidden but real threat to peace. By impairing human dignity, it constitutes a serious attack on the value of life and strikes at the heart of the peaceful development of society.

## Poverty as a result of conflict

In recent years we have witnessed on almost every continent local wars and internal conflicts of savage intensity. Ethnic, tribal and racial violence has destroyed human lives, divided com-



AP/Wide World Photos  
Mary Rider of Raleigh, N.C., carries a cross to a vigil outside the gates of Central Prison Oct. 17, 1991. Rider was among a group of demonstrators who held a candle light vigil to protest an execution.

munities that previously lived together in peace and left in its wake anguish and feelings of hatred. Recourse to violence, in fact, aggravates existing tensions and creates new ones. Nothing is resolved by war; on the contrary, everything is placed in jeopardy by war. The results of this scourge are the suffering and death of innumerable individuals, the disintegration of human relations and the irreparable loss of an immense artistic and environmental patrimony. War worsens the sufferings of the poor; indeed, it creates new poor by destroying means of subsistence, homes and property, and by eating away at the very fabric of the social environment. Young people see their hopes for the future shattered and too often, as victims, they become irresponsible agents of conflict. Women, children, the elderly, the sick and the wounded are forced to flee and become refugees who have no possessions beyond what they can carry with them ...

While acknowledging that the international and humanitarian organizations are doing much to alleviate the tragic fate of the victims of violence, I feel it is my duty to urge all people of good will to intensify their efforts. In some instances, in fact, the future of refugees depends entirely on the generosity of people who take them in — people who are as poor, if not poorer, than they are. It is only through the concern and cooperation of the international community that satisfactory solutions will be found ...

## A spirit of poverty as a source of peace

In today's industrialized countries people are dominated by the frenzied race for possession material goods. The consumer society makes the gap separating rich from poor even more obvious, and the uncontrolled search for a comfortable life risks blinding people to the needs of others. In order to promote the social, cultural, spiritual and also economic welfare of all members

of society, it is therefore absolutely essential to stem the unrestrained consumption of earthly goods and to control the creation of artificial needs. Moderation and simplicity ought to become the criteria of our daily lives. The quantity of goods consumed by a tiny fraction of the world population produces a demand greater than available resources. A reduction of this demand constitutes a first step in alleviating poverty, provided that it is accompanied by effective measures to guarantee a fair distribution of the world's wealth.

In this regard, the Gospel invites believers not to accumulate the goods of this passing world: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Mt. 6:19-20). This is a duty intrinsic to the Christian vocation, no less than the duty of working to overcome poverty; and it is also a very effective means for succeeding in this task.

Evangelical poverty is very different from socio-economic poverty. While the latter has harsh and often tragic characteristics, since it is experienced as a form of coercion, evangelical poverty is chosen freely by the person who intends in this way to respond to Christ's admonition: "Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33) ...

Evangelical poverty is something that transforms those who accept it. They cannot remain indifferent when faced with the suffering of the poor; indeed, they feel impelled to share actively with God his preferential love for them (cf. "*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*," 42). Those who are poor in the Gospel sense are ready to sacrifice their resources and their own selves so that others may live. Their one desire is to live in peace with everyone, offering to others the gift of Jesus' peace (cf. Jn. 14:27).

The Divine Master has taught us by his life and words the demanding features of this poverty which leads us to true freedom. He "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:6-7). He was born in poverty; as a child he was forced to go into exile with his family in order to escape the cruelty of Herod; he lived as one who had "nowhere to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20). He was denigrated as a "glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Mt. 11:19) and suffered the death reserved for criminals. He called the poor blessed and assured them that the kingdom of God belonged to them (cf. Lk. 6:20). He reminded the rich that the share of wealth stifles God's word (cf. Mt. 13:22) and that it is difficult for them to enter the kingdom of God (cf. Mk. 10:25).

Christ's example, no less than his words, is normative for Christians. We know that, at the Last Judgment, we shall all be judged, without distinction, on our practical love of our brothers and sisters. Indeed, it will be in the practical love they have shown that, on that day, many will discover that they have in fact met Christ, although without having known him before in an explicit way (cf. Mt. 25:35-37).

"If you want peace, reach out to the poor!" May rich and poor recognize that they are brothers and sisters; may they share what they have with one another as children of the one God who loves everyone, who wills the good of everyone, and who offers to everyone the gift of peace.

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Directed by:

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### Feb. 13 VALENTINES EVENING FOR MARRIED COUPLES — Mass, Renewal of Vows and Dinner. 6-10p.m. Celebrant: Fr. Tom Mull.

### Feb. 18 AN EVENING TO RECHARGE RECOVERY THROUGH REDISCOVERING SEXUALITY — Given by: Sr. Mary Sullivan.

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All events are open to men and women of all faiths



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