

MARCH 2, 1995

Lent



Papal message

Illiteracy is a plague that paralyzes the mind

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Here is the Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's 1995 message for Lent, dated Sept. 7, 1994, and released by the Vatican on Jan. 26. Ash Wednesday was March 1.

"The Spirit of the Lord ... has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim ... recovery of sight to the blind" (Lk 4:18).

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. During the season of Lent, I would like to reflect with all of you on the hidden evil which deprives a great number of poor people of many possibilities for progress. It likewise deprives them of victory over marginalization and hinders them from attaining true freedom. I am speaking of illiteracy. Pope Paul VI reminded us that "lack of education is as serious as lack of food; the illiterate person is a starved spirit" ("Populorum Progressio," 35).

This terrible affliction helps to keep vast multitudes of people in a state of underdevelopment, with all the scandalous misery which that brings. Abundant testimonies from different continents, as well as the meetings which I have had in the course of my apostolic travels, confirm my conviction that where there is illiteracy there is more hunger, disease and infant mortality, as well as humiliation, exploitation and all kinds of suffering, than there is elsewhere.

A person who can neither read nor write finds great difficulties in making use of modern work methods; he is as if he were condemned to be ignorant of his rights and duties; he is truly poor. We must realize that hundreds of millions of adults are illiterate, that tens of millions of children cannot go to school, either because there is no school nearby or because poverty prevents them from attending. They are stunted precisely when their lives should be blossoming and are prevented from ex-

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