

Pope's Lenten message for 2014: "Let us confront the poverty of our brothers and sisters"



(©Ansa) Poverty in Africa

When jobs, health and education are lacking, "moral destitution can be considered impending suicide." Today a family of Haiti missionaries with a group of children visited the Vatican newsroom

IACOPO SCARAMUZZI
VATICAN CITY

"How many people no longer see meaning in life or prospects for the future, how many have lost hope!" Pope Francis wrote this in his first Lenten message, presented today in the Vatican. In the text, Bergoglio describes "three types of destitution": "material," "moral," – which can be considered "impending suicide" because it is often caused by a lack of jobs, health and education –and "spiritual". In his message, the Pope invites faithful to see the run-up to Lent as the ideal time for "self-denial".

In his brief message, Jorge Mario Bergoglio explained that he took his inspiration from an expression used by St. Paul in the Second Letter to the Corinthians: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." Indeed, this year's Lenten message is entitled: "By his poverty you might become rich". "What do these words of Saint Paul mean for us Christians today? What does this invitation to poverty, a life of evangelical poverty, mean to us today?" the Pope asked. Francis underlined that "love makes us similar, it creates equality, it breaks down walls and eliminates distances."

"God did this with us ... God did not let our salvation drop down from heaven, like someone who gives alms from their abundance out of a sense of altruism and piety."

The Pope then goes on to touch on social issues in the second paragraph entitled: "Our witness". He explains that it would be wrong to think that this "way" of poverty was Jesus' way, "whereas we who come after him can save the world with the right kind of human resources." "God's wealth passes not through our wealth, but invariably and exclusively through our personal and communal poverty, enlivened by the Spirit of Christ."

Bergoglio distinguishes between "three types of destitution: material, moral and spiritual." "Material destitution is what is normally called poverty, and affects those living in conditions opposed to human dignity: those who lack basic rights and needs such as food, water, hygiene, work and the opportunity to develop and grow culturally." "In response to this destitution, the Church offers her help, her diakonia, in meeting these needs and binding these wounds which disfigure the face of humanity ... ending violations of human dignity, discrimination and abuse in the world."

The Pope writes that "when power, luxury and money become idols, they take priority over the need for a fair distribution of wealth. Our consciences thus need to be converted to justice, equality, simplicity and sharing." "No less a concern is moral destitution, which consists in slavery to vice and sin. How much pain is caused in families because one of their members – often a young person - is in thrall to alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography! How many people no longer see meaning in life or prospects for the future, how many have lost hope! And how many are plunged into this destitution by unjust social conditions, by unemployment, which takes away their dignity as breadwinners, and by lack of equal access to education and health care. In such cases, moral destitution can be considered impending suicide." This form of destitution "which also causes financial ruin, is invariably linked to the spiritual destitution which we experience when we turn away from God and reject his love."

Finally, the Pope expressed the hope that this Lenten season will "find the whole Church ready to bear witness to all those who live in material, moral and spiritual destitution the Gospel message of the merciful love of God our Father, who is ready to embrace everyone in Christ. We can do so to the extent that we imitate Christ who became poor and enriched us by his poverty. Lent is a fitting time for self-denial; we would do well to ask ourselves what we can give up in order to help and enrich others by our own poverty. Let us not forget that real poverty hurts: no self-denial is real without this dimension of penance. I distrust a charity that costs nothing and does not hurt."