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| **PRESENTATION OF HOLY FATHER'S LENTEN MESSAGE FOR 2012**VATICAN CITY, 7 FEB 2012 (VIS) - This morning in the Holy See Press Office, a press conference was held to present the Holy Father's 2012 Lenten Message. Participating in the conference were Cardinal Robert Sarah, president of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum"; Msgr. Giampietro Dal Toso and Msgr. Segundo Tejado Munoz, respectively secretary and under secretary of the same council."We know that the Lenten Message contributes to maintaining the faithful's sense of concern for others, communion, compassion and fraternal sharing of the sufferings of those in need", said Cardinal Sarah. "However, over and above this important issue, there is another aspect of Christian life which this year's text highlights: fraternal correction"."Charity teaches us that we are responsible not only for the material well being of others, but also for their moral and spiritual good. ... We cannot overlook the fact that a certain ideology which exalts the rights of the individual can have the consequence of creating isolation and solitude. ... When the call to communion is denied in the name of individualism it is our humanity that suffers, deceived by the impossible mirage of a happiness obtainable alone. Therefore we can help one another by discovering our reciprocal responsibility the one for the other"."The Church's activity in the modern world must also be seen in the light of fraternal correction in truth and charity", the cardinal went on. "Sometimes it is thought that the Church's concerns, her tenacious resistance to certain fashionable ideas, are moved by thirst or nostalgia for power This is not the case. The Church is moved by a sincere concern for mankind and for the world. Her activities are not moved by a desire to condemn or recriminate, but by a justice and mercy which must also have the courage to call things by their name. Only in this way can we expose the roots of evil, which continue to intrigue the mind of modern man. This task of the Church is called prophetic mission".In the Old Testament, Cardinal Sarah explained, "a prophet was a man called and sent by God to announce His will to the people. ... Clearly the call for greater social justice is part of mission of the Church", which "cannot remain silent in the face of the fact that too many people die because they lack basic necessities while others grow rich exploiting their fellows. Yet the prophetic dimension of our words and deeds cannot be limited to these external phenomena without going to the moral roots of these injustices. Corruption, accumulation of riches, violence, unduly living at the expense of the commonwealth without contributing are all tumours that consume a society from within. Nor can we remain silent ... about the fact that the roots of the current financial crisis lie in greed, unrestrained and unscrupulous thirst for money without considering those who have less and who must bear the consequences of the mistaken choices of others. Such attachment to money is a sin, and the Church is prophetic in her condemnation of that sin, which harms both individuals and society"."Yet the Holy Father ... identifies an even more profound dimension. The Church is a prophet in this world to denounce the absence of God. ... Our secularised society lives and organises itself without reference to God because it is affected by a poverty more tragic even than material want; a poverty represented by the rejection and complete exclusion of God from social and economic life, by the revolt against divine and natural laws. ... The primary responsibility of the Church is to remind each generation that this spiritual dimension is vital. The prophet of today must tell the world that God exists, that without this Father who stirs us to solidarity and sharing life dies and fraternity dissolves into empty utopia, that man has a supernatural vocation, that we have a conscience in which the voice of God speaks and to which we must one day respond"."Today's message", the cardinal concluded, "aims to awaken people's consciences with respect to the rights and duties of our fellows, but also with respect to our duties towards the 'rights' of God. All this comes about in the context of Christian communion ruled by the principle of reciprocity and fraternal correction, with a view to the temporal good of mankind and his eschatological salvation". |
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| **POPE'S LENTEN MESSAGE: CHARITY AS A MEANS TO SALVATION**VATICAN CITY, 7 FEB 2012 (VIS) - Made public today was the 2012 Lenten Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI, the title of which is taken from the Letter to the Hebrews: "Let us be concerned for each other, to stir a response in love and good works". Extracts from the English-language version of the document are given below:"The Lenten season offers us once again an opportunity to reflect upon the very heart of Christian life: charity. This is a favourable time to renew our journey of faith, both as individuals and as a community, with the help of the word of God and the Sacraments"."This year I would like to propose a few thoughts in the light of a brief biblical passage drawn from the Letter to the Hebrews: 'Let us be concerned for each other, to stir a response in love and good works'".(1) Let us be concerned for each other: responsibility towards our brothers and sisters."This first aspect is an invitation to be 'concerned'. ... The verb which introduces our exhortation tells us to look at others, first of all at Jesus, to be concerned for one another, and not to remain isolated and indifferent to the fate of our brothers and sisters. All too often, however, our attitude is just the opposite: an indifference and disinterest born of selfishness and masked as a respect for 'privacy'. ... Even today God asks us to be 'guardians' of our brothers and sisters, to establish relationships based on mutual consideration and attentiveness to the well-being, the integral well-being of others. The great commandment of love for one another demands that we acknowledge our responsibility towards those who, like ourselves, are creatures and children of God. Being brothers and sisters in humanity and, in many cases, also in the faith, should help us to recognise in others a true alter ego, infinitely loved by the Lord. If we cultivate this way of seeing others as our brothers and sisters, solidarity, justice, mercy and compassion will naturally well up in our hearts"."Concern for others entails desiring what is good for them from every point of view: physical, moral and spiritual. Contemporary culture seems to have lost the sense of good and evil, yet there is a real need to reaffirm that good does exist and will prevail, because God is 'generous and acts generously'. The good is whatever gives, protects and promotes life, brotherhood and communion. Responsibility towards others thus means desiring and working for the good of others, in the hope that they too will become receptive to goodness and its demands. Concern for others means being aware of their needs. Sacred Scripture warns us of the danger that our hearts can become hardened by a sort of 'spiritual anaesthesia' which numbs us to the suffering of others. The Evangelist Luke relates two of Jesus' parables by way of example": the parable of the Good Samaritan and the parable of Dives and Lazarus. Both "show examples of the opposite of 'being concerned', of looking upon others with love and compassion. What hinders this humane and loving gaze towards our brothers and sisters? Often it is the possession of material riches and a sense of sufficiency, but it can also be the tendency to put our own interests and problems above all else. We should never be incapable of 'showing mercy' towards those who suffer. Our hearts should never be so wrapped up in our affairs and problems that they fail to hear the cry of the poor. ... Reaching out to others and opening our hearts to their needs can become an opportunity for salvation and blessedness."'Being concerned for each other' also entails being concerned for their spiritual well-being. Here I would like to mention an aspect of the Christian life, which I believe has been quite forgotten: fraternal correction in view of eternal salvation. Today, in general, we are very sensitive to the idea of charity and caring about the physical and material well-being of others, but almost completely silent about our spiritual responsibility towards our brothers and sisters. This was not the case in the early Church. ... Christ Himself commands us to admonish a brother who is committing a sin. ... The Church's tradition has included 'admonishing sinners' among the spiritual works of mercy. It is important to recover this dimension of Christian charity. We must not remain silent before evil. I am thinking of all those Christians who, out of human regard or purely personal convenience, adapt to the prevailing mentality, rather than warning their brothers and sisters against ways of thinking and acting that are contrary to the truth and that do not follow the path of goodness. Christian admonishment, for its part, is never motivated by a spirit of accusation or recrimination. It is always moved by love and mercy, and springs from genuine concern for the good of the other. ... In a world pervaded by individualism, it is essential to rediscover the importance of fraternal correction, so that together we may journey towards holiness. ... It is a great service, then, to help others and allow them to help us, so that we can be open to the whole truth about ourselves, improve our lives and walk more uprightly in the Lord's ways". (2) Being concerned for each other: the gift of reciprocity."This 'custody' of others is in contrast to a mentality that, by reducing life exclusively to its earthly dimension, fails to see it in an eschatological perspective and accepts any moral choice in the name of personal freedom. A society like ours can become blind to physical sufferings and to the spiritual and moral demands of life. This must not be the case in the Christian community!""The Lord's disciples, united with Him through the Eucharist, live in a fellowship that binds them one to another as members of a single body. This means that the other is part of me, and that his or her life, his or her salvation, concern my own life and salvation. Here we touch upon a profound aspect of communion: our existence is related to that of others, for better or for worse. Both our sins and our acts of love have a social dimension. This reciprocity is seen in the Church, the mystical body of Christ: the community constantly does penance and asks for the forgiveness of the sins of its members, but also unfailingly rejoices in the examples of virtue and charity present in her midst. ... Christians can also express their membership in the one body which is the Church through concrete concern for the poorest of the poor. Concern for one another likewise means acknowledging the good that the Lord is doing in others". (3) To stir a response in love and good works: walking together in holiness."These words of the Letter to the Hebrews urge us to reflect on the universal call to holiness. ... The time granted us in this life is precious for discerning and performing good works in the love of God. In this way the Church herself continuously grows towards the full maturity of Christ. Our exhortation to encourage one another to attain the fullness of love and good works is situated in this dynamic prospect of growth."Sadly, there is always the temptation to become lukewarm, to quench the Spirit, to refuse to invest the talents we have received, for our own good and for the good of others. All of us have received spiritual or material riches meant to be used for the fulfilment of God's plan, for the good of the Church and for our personal salvation. The spiritual masters remind us that in the life of faith those who do not advance inevitably regress"."In a world which demands of Christians a renewed witness of love and fidelity to the Lord, may all of us feel the urgent need to anticipate one another in charity, service and good works. This appeal is particularly pressing in this holy season of preparation for Easter". |
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| **PROMOTING A CHURCH CULTURE OF SUPPORT FOR ABUSE VICTIMS**VATICAN CITY, 7 FEB 2012 (VIS) - An international symposium entitled "Towards Healing and Renewal" began yesterday evening in Rome's Gregorian University. The event, which will run until 9 February and brings together bishops and religious superiors from all over the world, aims to relaunch the Church's commitment to protecting minors and vulnerable people from child abuse. During the opening session a message was read out, sent in the Holy Father's name by Cardinal Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone S.D.B. to Fr. Francois-Xavier Dumortier S.J., rector of the Gregorian.In his English-language message, Cardinal Bertone notes that, "as His Holiness has often observed, healing for victims must be of paramount concern in the Christian community, and it must go hand in hand with a profound renewal of the Church at every level. ... The Holy Father therefore supports and encourages every effort to respond with evangelical charity to the challenge of providing children and vulnerable adults with an ecclesial environment conducive to their human and spiritual growth. He urges the participants in the symposium to continue drawing on a wide range of expertise in order to promote throughout the Church a vigorous culture of effective safeguarding and victim support".The Pope also prays to the Lord that the symposium may help the Church "to respond in a truly Christ-like manner to the tragedy of child abuse". |