

IN PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH THE HOLY SEE

Venerable Brethren,

Health and Apostolic Benediction.

It was the expectation and hope of Our paternal heart that, once the terrible conflict was at an end and the spirit of Christian charity restored, the regions desolated by famine and misery, especially in Central Europe, might little by little improve their condition, thanks to the united efforts of all good men. But this Our hope has not been realized by events. As a matter of fact, information reaches Us from all sides that those populous regions are deprived of food and clothing to a degree beyond all imagination, so that a most lamentable decay of health is the result among the less hardy, and especially among the children. This their misfortune afflicts Our heart all the more as they are altogether innocent and even ignorant of the sanguinary conflict which has desolated almost the whole world; and, moreover, they represent the germs of the future generations, which cannot but feel the effects of their debilitation.

2. Nevertheless, Our distress has been somewhat relieved by learning that men of good will have banded themselves in societies in order to "save the children." We have not hesitated to approve and confirm with Our authority, as was fitting, this noble plan. Indeed, it corresponds with the grave duty of affection which We feel towards that tender age which is most dear to our Divine Redeemer, and which has least strength to bear and suffer ills. In fact, We had done this formerly. You will remember that at no distant date we endeavoured with Our means to succour the little children in Belgium who were in extremity of hunger and of misery, and recommended them to the public charity of Catholics. The generosity of the latter was such that in great part it was owing to it that it was possible to provide for the necessities of so many innocent children and to preserve their life and health. In fact, as soon as We had addressed Our exhortation for this noble purpose to the Episcopate of the United States of America, Our desires were generously met by the widest correspondence. We record this happy result today, not only to pay the tribute of Our praise to men worthy of being remembered in the annals of Christian charity, but also by Our voice and authority to invite the Bishops of the whole world to take steps in order to carry into effect Our proposal, and for this purpose to employ all their prestige with their flocks. With the approach of the season of Christmas, commemorating the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, our thoughts spontaneously fly to the poor little children, especially in Central Europe, who are most cruelly feeling the wants of the necessities of life; and We embrace this tender age with all the more solicitude inasmuch as it more exactly recalls the image of the Divine Infant supporting for love of men in the cave at Bethlehem the rigour of winter and the want of all things. No other circumstance could be more opportune than this to induce Us to solicit for innocent children the charity and pity of Christians and of all who do not despair of the salvation of the human race.

3. Wherefore, Venerable Brethren, with the purpose of attaining in your respective dioceses the object of which We have spoken, We direct that on next December 28, the feast of the Holy Innocents, you should order public prayers and gather the alms of the faithful. In order to help on a larger scale so many poor children in this-most noble competition of charity, in addition to money it will be necessary to gather food, medicines and clothing, all of which are so greatly wanting in these regions. We need not delay in explaining how such offerings may be conveniently divided and forwarded to their destination. This task may be confided to the committees which have been formed for this object, and may provide for it in any manner whatsoever.

4. Finally, We trust that the exhortation which, moved by duty of that universal fatherhood which God has confided to Us, We have made, although addressed principally to Catholics, may be benevolently listened to by all who have the sentiments of humanity. Moreover, in order to afford an example to others, notwithstanding the continual requests for

help which reach Us from all sides, We have determined, to the extent of Our means, to contribute to the relief of these poor children the sum of 100,000 lire.

5. Meanwhile, as an auspice of the happy results which We expect from your benevolence, We impart with all affection to you, Venerable Brethren, and to your clergy and people, the Apostolic Benediction.

Given at St. Peter's, Rome, on the 24th of November, in the year 1919, in the sixth of Our Pontificate.

BENEDICT XV

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