

1. While the terrible war raged We used all Our powers of persuasion and appeal to bring to a speedy end a conflict which had lasted all too long and to secure an agreement guaranteeing justice, equity and right. The same way now that fighting has ceased, but peace has not yet been restored, in virtue of Our apostolic office, We are leaving nothing undone to provide timely relief for so many ills and all possible comfort for the accumulated miseries that weigh on not a few nations. But of the almost countless ills born of the dire struggle none so hurts or so wounds Our paternal heart as that which involves a host of innocent children, millions of whom it is estimated are in many countries without the necessities of life and are suffering from cold, hunger and disease. Often, too, in their utter dereliction they feel the want not only of food, clothes and shelter but also of the affection which their tender years so need.
2. As you know, Venerable Brethren, We have done all that We could to solve this problem. And We gladly take this occasion to express Our sincerest gratitude to those through whose liberality We have been able to alleviate somewhat the need of these infants and children. We know, too, that many have individually or as members of societies and organizations undertaken to help or are already actively at work. To these, worthy of all praise as they are, We pay due tribute and pray God to bless their activities, their plans for the future, their achievements.
3. But since help of this kind is entirely inadequate to the immense task, We have deemed it Our duty to turn to you and paternally urge you to take to heart the extremely grave plight of these needy children, leaving nothing undone that may contribute to ease their lot and bring relief.
4. We ordain, therefore, that in each of your dioceses you assign a day on which public prayers will be offered to appease God's anger and on which through your priests you will admonish the faithful of this urgent need and exhort them to support by their prayers, good works and offerings every movement that is directing its forces fully and effectively for the succor of needy and abandoned children.
5. This is a problem, of course, which touches all citizens, whatever be their views, if only their hearts respond to the appeals of nature and religion. But it belongs, in a special sense, to Christians who should see stamped on these poor destitute little brothers the image of the Divine Child and who are bound to heed those words: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me" (Matt. 25, 40).
6. Let all remember and reflect that these children will be pillars of the next generation and that it is essential that they grow up healthy in mind and body if we are to avoid a race infected with sickness and vice. Nobody should hesitate, then, to contribute time and money to a cause so opportune and essential. Those who are themselves less wealthy should give what they can with open hand and willing heart. Those who live in luxury should reflect and remember that the indigence, hunger and nakedness of these children will constitute a grave and severe indictment of them before God, the Father of mercies, if they harden their hearts and do not contribute generously. All, finally, should be convinced that their liberality will not be loss but gain, for we can safely say that one who gives from his means to the poor is lending to God Who, in His own time, will repay his generosity with abundant interest.
7. We firmly trust that, as in Apostolic times, when the Christian population of Jerusalem was subjected to poverty and persecution, the rest of the faithful throughout the world contributed their prayers and material aid. (Cf. I Cor. 16,1) so now, too, all will be inspired and animated by the same charity and will help as much as they can. This they should do, as We have said, especially by fervent prayer to our most merciful Redeemer. For, as you know, fervent prayer carries with it a mystic power that penetrates Heaven and calls down supernatural light and Divine impulses to illumine men's minds and incline their wills to good, to persuade and move them to charity.
8. Let us recall that in every age the Church has exercised the most diligent care of the young and has rightly deemed this as an official mission assigned in a very special way to her charity. And as she did this and continues to do it, she

undoubtedly was following in the footsteps and obeying the injunctions of her Divine Founder, Who, gently gathering the children around Him, said to the Apostles who rebuked their mothers: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10, 14). For Christ, as Our predecessor of immortal memory, Leo the Great, very well says, "loves childhood which He had first assumed in mind and body. Christ loves childhood, the school of humility, the norm of innocence, the model of meekness. Christ loves childhood towards which He directs morality, to which He leads back the old age of men. Those whom He calls to His eternal kingdom above He inspires to follow His example" (Serm. XXXVII C. 3, ML 54, 258 C).

9. In the light of such words and sentiments, Venerable Brethren, you see with what love, diligence and care the Church looks after infants and children following the lead of her Founder. While she exercises all possible care to see that they be provided with food, shelter and clothing for their bodies, she does not ignore or neglect their souls which - born, so to speak, from the breath of God - seem to portray the radiant beauty of Heaven. Her first care and endeavor is, then, to preserve their innocence from stain and provide for their eternal salvation.

10. Accordingly, there are numberless institutions and organizations to educate the young, form them to solid virtue, and satisfy their needs in education as they grow in mind and body. In this important field, as you know, many Religious Orders and congregations of men and women are laboring with admirable zeal and effect, and their prudent, alert, devoted activity is making a magnificent contribution to the progress of Church and State. This is being done not only in civilized countries, with large and excellent results, but also among uncultured peoples or those which the light of Christian truth has not yet reached, where missionary endeavor and, especially, the Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood, rescues so many children and infants from the slavery of the devil and of wicked men, procuring for them the freedom of the children of God, and trains them to be members of civilized society.

11. But at this tragic moment of history, when - alas - material and spiritual ruins are piled high, these providential charitable enterprises, which, perhaps, seemed capable of dealing with normal needs of this kind are certainly inadequate. For, Venerable Brethren, We almost seem to see with Our own eyes the vast hosts of children weakened or at death's door through starvation. They hold out their little hands asking for bread "and there is no one to break it unto them" (Lam. 4, 4). Without home, without clothing, they shiver in the winter cold and die. And there are no fathers or mothers to warm and clothe them. Ailing, or even in the last stages of consumption, they are without the necessary medicines and medical care. We see them, too, passing before Our sorrowful gaze, wandering through the noisy city street, reduced to unemployment and moral corruption, or drifting as vagrants uncertainly about the cities, the towns, the countryside, while no one - alas - provides safe refuge for them against want, vice and crime.

12. How, then, can We desist, Venerable Brethren, when We love those children of Ours so intensely in the heart of Jesus Christ (Philip 1, 8); how can We desist from appealing again and again to you all individually and collectively and to all throughout the world who, like you, are inspired with a sense of mercy and piety, so that the full force of Christian charity - and it is a mighty force - may be pooled by willing and generous souls in order to mitigate and relieve their piteous condition.

13. Let us use all the means that modern progress offers or recommends. Let new methods be devised which may, through the cooperation of all provide an effective remedy for present ills and for those which are feared in the future. Thus, may it speedily come about that with God's help and inspiration the snares of vice, which hold so many derelict children as an easy prey, may give way to the attraction of a virtuous life; that their blank idleness and gloomy sloth may give way to honest and cheerful employment; that for their hunger, starvation and nakedness they may have adequate relief from the Divine charity of Jesus Christ, which should be most alive, eager and strong among His followers at a time like this.

14. Such a change will contribute most effectively not only to the increase of the Catholic Religion and of Christian virtue but also to the good of the human family at large and of civil society. For, as all know, there would not be such a mass of delinquents in the common jails if greater and more suitable measures were taken to prevent especially juvenile delinquency. And if everywhere there grew up a healthy, honest and industrious youth, it would be easier to find citizens remarkable for their probity, fortitude and other mental and physical qualities.

15. This was Our purpose, Venerable Brethren, in writing to you this Encyclical about so grave a question, committing to you the task of communicating Our paternal exhortation in the way you consider most suitable to your flocks. And We firmly trust that this, Our exhortation and appeal, will meet with a ready answer from all and with generous contributions and collaboration.

16. Inspired by this hope, as a pledge of heavenly graces and a sign of Our special benevolence with all affection in the Lord, We impart the Apostolic Benediction to you all, Venerable Brethren, to the flocks committed to your care, and especially to those who have already, in any way, served this cause and to those who will serve it in the future.

Given at St. Peter's, Rome, on the 6th day of January, Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the year 1946, the seventh of Our Pontificate.

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