

ENCYCLICAL OF POPE LEO XIII PROCLAIMING AN EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE

Leo XIII

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

That which We, by the Apostolic authority, have more than once decreed, that an extraordinary year of Jubilee should be kept throughout the whole Christian world, and the treasures of heavenly gifts, the dispensation of which is in Our power, should be thrown open to the faithful—that with the favour of God We have determined to decree for the ensuing year. The advantages of this step will not escape you, Venerable Brethren, who are so familiar with the spirit of the age and the temper of the time, but there is a special reason now which makes Our decision seem more than usually opportune. In view of the fact that in Our recent Encyclical Letter We pointed out how important it is that the States should conform as closely as possible to truth and the Christian ideal, it will easily be understood how fitting it is that We should now use every effort to excite men, or to lead them back to the practice of Christian virtues. For a State is what the lives of the people make it: and just as the excellence of a ship or a house is dependent upon the good quality and the right adjustment of its component parts, so, unless the individual citizens lead good lives, the State cannot keep in the path of virtue, and without offending. Civil government and those things which constitute the public life of a country come into existence and perish by the act of men; and men almost always succeed in stamping the image of their opinions and their lives upon their public institutions. In order therefore that Our teaching may sink into men's minds, and what is the great thing, actually govern their daily lives, an attempt must be made to bring them to think and act like Christians, not less in public than in private.

2. And in this matter effort is the more needful because perils everywhere abound. The great virtues of our forefathers have in large measure disappeared; the most violent passions have claimed a freer indulgence; the madness of opinion which knows no restraint, or at least no effective restraint, every day extends further; of those whose principles are sound there are many who, through a misplaced timidity, are frightened, and have not the courage even to speak out their opinions boldly, far less to translate them into deeds; everywhere the worst examples are affecting public morals; wicked societies which We ourselves have denounced before now, skilled in all evil arts, are doing their best to lead the people astray, and as far as they are able, to withdraw them from God, their duty, and Christianity.

3. Amid these many and pressing evils, which are the more serious because they are already of long duration, nothing must be left undone by Us which can afford any hope of relief. With this purpose, and in this hope, We proclaim a sacred Jubilee to all those who have their salvation at heart, and need to be reminded and exhorted to raise their thoughts, now busied with worldly matters, to the contemplation of heavenly things. And this with a gain not merely to the individuals themselves, but to the whole future well-being of the commonwealth, because in proportion as individual citizens advance along the path of perfection, there is a corresponding increase in the general rectitude and probity, in the public life and morals of the nation.

4. But you will observe, Venerable Brethren, that success will largely depend upon your industry and zeal, as it will be needful to prepare the people properly and carefully if they are to reap the fruits which are to be placed before them. We commit it to your judgment and prudence to place this matter in the hands of priests whom you may select, that by discourses fitted to the capacity of the crowd they may instruct them, and above all exhort them to that penance which, according to St. Augustine, consists in "the daily chastisement of the good and the faithful followers of Christ in which we strike our breasts, saying forgive us our sins."⁽¹⁾ With good reason We mention here in the first place that part of penance which consists of the voluntary punishment of the body. You know the temper of the times - how many there are who love to live delicately and shrink from whatever requires manhood and generosity; who, when aliments come, discover in them sufficient reasons for not obeying the salutary laws of the Church, thinking the burden laid upon them more than they can bear, when they are told to abstain from certain kinds of food or to fast during a few days in the year.

It is not to be wondered at if, weakened by these habits of indulgence, they gradually give themselves up body and soul to the more imperious passions. It is therefore necessary to recall to the paths of moderation those who have fallen or who are likely to fall through this sort of effeminacy. Therefore those who speak to the people should lay it down persistently and clearly that according not only to the law of the Gospel, but even to the dictates of natural reason, a man is bound to govern himself and keep his passions under strict control, and moreover, that sin cannot be expiated except by penance. That the virtue of which We have spoken may be durable, it will be prudent to put it in some sort under the safe guard and protection of a stable institution; you know well, venerable brothers, to what We allude; We mean that you should continue each one in his own diocese to protect and propagate the Third Order, called the Secular Order, of the Franciscan Friars. To keep up the spirit of penance in the Christian multitude nothing is more effectual than the example and the grace of the Patriarch Francis of Assisi, who combined with the greatest innocence of life so much zeal for mortification that the image of Jesus Christ crucified was not less visible in his life and conduct than in the signs which were supernaturally impressed upon him. The laws of his Order, which We have modified for the times, are as light to bear as they are effectual for the practice of Christian virtue.

5. In the second place, as every hope of safety lies in the protection and succour of our Heavenly Father in the midst of so great private and public necessities, We would earnestly desire to see confidence united with the revival of an assiduous zeal in prayer. In every great crisis of Christendom, and every time the Church was afflicted by evils within or dangers without, our fore fathers, with their eyes lifted to Heaven in supplication, taught us how and when we should seek for the light of our souls, for the strength of virtue, and for help suited to the need. For deeply engraved upon men's minds were these precepts of Jesus Christ: "Ask and it shall be given you;"(2) "We ought always to pray and not to faint."(3) And with this teaching the word of the Apostle corresponds: "Pray without ceasing;"(4) "I desire, therefore, first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men."(5) Upon which subject St. John Chrysostom has left us this saying, not less true than ingenious, in the form of a comparison: "Even as man, who comes into the light of day naked and wanting all things, has been endowed by nature with hands to procure for himself all the necessities of life; so in supernatural things, seeing that of himself he can do nothing, he has received from God the faculty of prayer, that he may use it wisely for the obtaining of all that is needful to his salvation."

6. From all this, Venerable Brethren, each one of you may gather how agreeable to Us and how commendable is the zeal with which at Our suggestion you have spread the devotion to the Most Holy Rosary, especially in these last years. Nor can We pass over the popular piety which has almost everywhere been excited by this method of prayer. Now you must watch with the greatest care that this devotion be practiced with even greater and greater fervour, and that it be persevered in without failing. And if We insist upon this exhortation, as We have already done several times, not one of you will be surprised, for you understand how important it is that this habit of the Rosary of Mary should flourish among Christians. And you are perfectly aware that this is a part and a beautiful form of that spirit of prayer of which we speak, and that it is at once admirably suited to our times, easy to practice, and fruitful in results. But as the first and the chief fruit of the Jubilee must be, as We have already pointed out, amendment of life and progress in virtue, We deem especially necessary the avoidance of that evil which We have not neglected to point out in Our past Encyclicals. We allude to those internal, and, as it were, domestic dissensions among some of ourselves; dissensions of which it is hardly possible to say how much they break or relax the bonds of charity, to the great detriment of souls. If We recall this to you once more, Venerable Brethren, who are the guardians of ecclesiastical discipline and of mutual charity, it is that We desire to see your watchfulness and your authority always directed to the prevention of so great an evil. By your warnings, your exhortations, your reproaches, urge all "to keep the unity of spirit in the bond of peace," induce the authors of the dissensions, if such there be, to return to their duty by the consideration which they should ever keep in mind that the only-begotten Son of God, even at the approach of His last torments, asked nothing more urgently of His Father than the mutual love of those who believed, or should believe, in Him, "that they may all be one, even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us."(6)

7. Relying, therefore, on the mercy of the omnipotent God, and the authority of the Blessed Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, and making use of that power of binding and loosing which our Lord has given to Us, though unworthy of it, We grant under the form of a General Jubilee a plenary indulgence to all the faithful of both sexes upon this condition and

subject to this obligation, that during the coming year of 1886 they perform the things mentioned below.

8. The citizens and inhabitants of Rome must pay two visits to the Lateran, the Vatican, and the Liberian Basilicas, and pray there for some time to God according to Our intentions for the well-being and the exaltation of the Church, for the rooting out of all heresy, and for the conversion of all who are in error, and in accordance with Our intentions pour out prayers to God that concord may reign among Christian princes, and that peace and unity may be the lot of all the faithful. They must also fast for two days, only using the food usually allowed in times of penance, in addition to the forty days of Lent and other days set aside by the Church as fast days. They must also, after having properly confessed their sins, receive Holy Communion, and, in accordance with the advice of their confessor, give an alms, each according to his means, to the furthering of some work likely to promote the propagation and increase of the Catholic Church. Each may choose the object he prefers; but We think it well especially to name two, towards which assistance may be given with the greatest advantage; and of these each is an object which in many places is in need of help and aid, and fruitful in advantage, not less for the State than for the Church, We mean the Primary schools for boys and the Seminaries for the Clergy.

9. Those who reside outside Rome, in whatever part of the world they may live, must pay two visits at prescribed intervals to three churches to be appointed by you, Venerable Brethren, your Vicars or Officials, on your or their command, by those who have the charge of souls; or three visits if there are only two churches, or six visits if there is only one; and also must comply with all the conditions already laid down above. This indulgence may be applied by way of suffrage to the souls who have departed this life joined in charity with God. We give you power to reduce the number of the visits according to your judgment to certain churches in the case of chapters, congregations, as well secular as regular, communities, confraternities, universities, and colleges where the visits are made in procession.

10. Sailors and travellers may obtain the indulgence upon their return home, or their arrival at some fixed station, by visiting six times the principal church, or the parish church of the district, and complying with the other conditions which We have already laid down. In the case of regulars of either sex, and even in the case of persons belonging to enclosed orders, and also in the case of all others, whether ecclesiastical or lay, who are prevented either because they are in prison, or through infirmity, or any other good reason, from fulfilling the above conditions, or some of them, the confessor has power to commute for other pious works, and also has power to dispense from Communion children who have not yet made their First Communion. Moreover, We grant to all and each of the faithful, both lay and ecclesiastical, secular and regular, of whatever order and institute, and even of those which ought to be specially named, that they should choose for the purpose of the Jubilee any approved confessor they like; nuns, novices, and other women living in the cloister may avail themselves of this power provided the confessor chosen is approved for nuns. To confessors up on this occasion, and while the time of this Jubilee lasts, We grant all the faculties which were granted by Our Letters Apostolic of February 15th, 1879, beginning with the words Pontifices maximi; always excepting the things which were excepted in those Letters.

11. Finally let all do their best to gain the graces of heaven during this time by a special devotion to the great Mother of God. For We wish this Jubilee to be placed under the patronage of the Most Holy Rosary of the Virgin; and with her assistance We are confident that there will be many whose souls, set free by the cleansing away of the stains of sin, will be renewed by faith and piety and justice, not only to the hope of eternal salvation, but also as an earnest of a more peaceful time.

12. As a pledge of heavenly graces and a witness to Our fatherly good will towards you, We give from the bottom of Our heart the Apostolic Benediction to you and your Clergy, and the whole people committed to your care and watchfulness.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, on the twenty-second day of December, in the year 1885, the eighth of Our Pontificate.

LEO XIII

REFERENCES:

1. Ep. 108.

- 2. Mr VII, 7.**
- 3. Lk XVIII, 1.**
- 4. I Th V, 17.**
- 5. I Tim II, 1.**
- 6. Jn XVII, 21.**

Copyright © Dicastery for Communication

Source: vatican.va