Bread for the World
Louisiana

The Twomey Center for Peace Through Justice
Loyola University New Orleans

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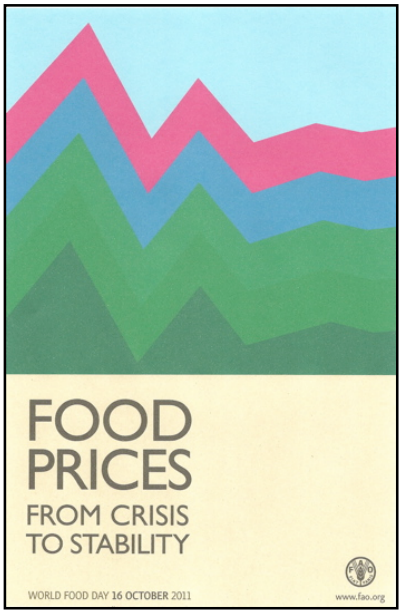
"The Purpose of This Day Should Be a Commitment to Modify Behavior"

The message Pope Benedict XVI sent to Mr. Jacques Diouf, director-general of the U.N. Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) on the occasion of World Food Day, October 16, 2011.

The annual celebration of World Food Day, while recalling the foundation of the FAO and its commitment in favor of agricultural development to combat hunger and malnutrition, is also an occasion to underscore the situation of so many brothers and sisters of ours who lack daily bread.

The painful images of numerous victims of famine in the Horn of Africa remain engraved before our eyes and every day a new chapter is added to what is one of the most serious humanitarian catastrophes of recent decades. Surely in the face of the death of entire communities caused by famine and the forced abandonment of the native lands, immediate aid is essential, but it is also necessary to intervene in the medium- and long-term so that international activity is not limited to responding only to emergencies.

The situation has been increasingly complicated because of the difficult crisis that is globally affecting various sectors of the economy and which harshly strikes the neediest above all, conditioning in turn agricultural production and the consequent possibility of access to foods. Nevertheless, the efforts of governments and other components of the international community must be oriented to effective options, aware that liberation from the yoke of hunger is the first concrete manifestation of the right to life, which -- despite its having been solemnly proclaimed -- is often very far from being fulfilled effectively.



Liberation from the yoke of hunger is the first concrete manifestation of the right to life.

The theme chosen for the Day: "Food Prices: From Crisis to Stability," invites us to reflect on the importance of the different factors that can give people and communities essential resources, beginning with agricultural work, which must not be considered as a secondary activity, but as the objective of every strategy of growth and integral development. This is still more important if we keep in mind that the availability of foods is increasingly conditioned by the volatility of prices and sudden climatic changes. We observe at the same time a continuous abandonment of rural areas with a global decline in agricultural production and, hence, in food reserves. Moreover, spreading everywhere, unfortunately, is the idea that food is just one more merchandise and, hence, also subject to speculative movements.

The availability of food is increasingly conditioned by the volatility of prices and sudden climatic change.

It cannot be ignored that -- despite the progress achieved up to now and the hopes based on an economy that increasingly respects the dignity of every person -- the future of the human family is in need of a new impulse to overcome present fragilities and uncertainties. Although we live in a global dimension, there are evident signs of the profound division between those who lack daily sustenance and those who have many resources, using them often for ends other than food and even destroying them. Confirmed thus is that globalization makes us feel closer but not brothers (cf. Caritas in Veritate, 19). Because of this, those Christian values inscribed in the heart of every person and which have always inspired his action must be rediscovered: the feeling of compassion and humanity toward others and the duty of solidarity and commitment to justice, must again be the basis of every activity, including those carried out by the international community.

Given the magnitude of the tragedy of famine, it is not enough to invite reflection and analyze the problems, nor even the willingness to intervene. Too often these factors are useless because they are reduced to the sphere of emotions, without being capable of moving the conscience and its search for truth and goodness. Frequent are the attempts to justify the conduct and omissions dictated by egoism and by private objectives and interests. On the contrary, the purpose of this Day should be a commitment to modify behavior and decisions, which ensure today rather than tomorrow, that every person has access to the necessary food, and that the agricultural sector has a level of investments and resources capable of giving stability to production and hence to the market. It is easy to reduce discussions to the food requirements for an increasing population, knowing well that the causes of hunger have

other roots and have caused so many victims among so many Lazaruses who are not allowed to sit at the table of the rich Epulon (cf. Paul VI, Populorum Progressio, 47).

In short, it is about assuming an interior attitude of responsibility, capable of inspiring a different style of life, with necessary sobriety in conduct and consumption, to thus favor the good of society. And that this is true also for future generations, for their sustainability, protection of the goods of creation, distribution of resources and, above all, the concrete commitment to the development of whole peoples and nations. For their part, the beneficiaries of international cooperation are called to use any solidaristic contribution responsibly in "rural infrastructures, irrigation systems, transport, organization of markets, and in the development and dissemination of agricultural technology that can make the best use of the human, natural and socio-economic resources that are more readily available at the local level," (Caritas in Veritate, 27).

All this can be accomplished if the international institutions also guarantee their service with impartiality and efficacy, but respecting fully the most profound convictions of the human soul and the aspirations of every person. In this perspective, the FAO can contribute to guarantee adequate food for all, to reinforce methods of cultivation and commercialization and to protect the fundamental rights of those who work the earth, without ever forgetting the most authentic values that are protected in the rural world and those who live in it.

The Catholic Church is close to institutions that commit themselves to guarantee food. Through her structures and development agencies, she will continue to support them actively in this effort so that every nation and community will have the necessary food security, which no commitment or negotiation, no matter how accredited it is, will be able to ensure without real solidarity and genuine fraternity.

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"The importance of this goal is such as to demand our openness to understand it in depth and to mobilize ourselves at the level of the 'heart,' so as to ensure that current economic and social processes evolve towards fully human outcomes" (Caritas in Veritate, 20).

With these sentiments I wish you, Mr. Director General, to continue in the commitment in favor of the neediest that has characterized these years of responsibility and dedication, while I invoke upon the FAO upon each one of the Member States and above all upon your person, abundant blessings of the Almighty.

As 2011 comes to a close and we begin formulating our New Year resolutions for 2012, let us reflect on these words of Pope Benedict XVI and not forget our responsibility to the poor and hungry of our world. ■

"If we really love, we will work to change structures, systems, laws and policies that are harmful to people." - Msgr. Marvin A. Mottet

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Poverty Rate for Families with Children

Recent data by the U.S. Census Bureau reveals that nearly 46.2 million Americans now live in poverty, the highest figures on record. The poverty rate for children under 18 increased to 22% in 2010. Among children under 5, the poverty rate increased to 25.9%

A C T I O N

Urge your member of Congress to form a circle of protection around programs for hungry and poor people.

Message:

Protecting hungry and poor people is a fundamental value of our country.

Protecting anti-hunger programs bolsters our nation's economy and expands our future trade capacity by helping to build markets for U.S. goods and services.

Poverty-focused foreign assistance helps people lift themselves out of hunger and poverty.

Call the Capitol Switchboard to be connected to your member of Congress (202) 224-3121.

Blessings and Peace for a very Merry Christmas and a joyous New Year.

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