

The World Day of the Poor - 2020



Press Conference

The *World Day of the Poor* has reached its Fourth edition. The Day's theme, expressed in Pope Francis' Message made public last June 13, the liturgical memory of Saint Anthony of Padua, centers on the biblical expression: "*Stretch forth your hand to the poor*" (Sir 7:32). With a far-sighted vision, Pope Francis in that Message wanted to emphasize the urgency to which the Covid-19 pandemic has subjected the entire world. Recalling some expressions from that text can help us understand the initiatives that have been taken to offer a concrete sign of assistance and support to the ever-increasing number of families who find themselves in objective difficulty.

"A hand held out is a sign; a sign that immediately speaks of closeness, solidarity and love. In these months, when the whole world was prey to a virus that brought pain and death, despair and bewilderment, how many outstretched hands have we seen! The outstretched hands of physicians... of nurses...of administrators...of pharmacists...of priests. The outstretched hands of volunteers who helped people living on the streets and those who, with a home, yet had nothing to eat. The outstretched hands of men and women who worked to provide essential services and security. We could continue to speak of so many other outstretched hands, all of which make up a great litany of good works. Those hands defied contagion and fear in order to offer support and consolation" (n.6).

The Holy Father continues, "Now is a good time to recover the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world" (n.7).

Once again, Pope Francis has extended his hand with various initiatives to make this Day more tangible and concrete. Sunday, November 15 at 10 a.m., in St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis will celebrate the Holy Eucharist to mark *the Fourth World Day of the Poor*. The event will be transmitted

live on Rai 1, *TV2000*, *Telepace* and by all the Catholic broadcasters in the world connected to the Dicastery for Communication and it will be streamed on the Vatican News portal (vaticannews.va), for those wishing to participate while remaining in the safety of their homes. Besides Volunteers and Benefactors, only 100 persons will be present in St. Peter's Basilica, to represent symbolically all the poor people of the world who, on this day, particularly need the attention and solidarity of the Christian community. Some persons, who are assisted every day by different charitable associations, will proclaim the readings.

As one can imagine, the customary events that have been realized in recent years, I refer in particular to the Field Hospital in St. Peter's Square and the lunch with 1500 poor people together with the Holy Father in the Paul VI Hall, have been suspended in order to comply with current regulations. The pandemic, however, has not prevented the marking of this Day through concrete signs. In the clinic under the colonnade of St. Peter's, by the *Elemosineria Apostolica* (the Office of Papal Charities), the poor who must have access to dormitories or those who want to return to their homeland can get the corona virus cotton swab test. The clinic is open from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. and, in two weeks, has carried out 50 cotton swabs tests per day. In the same way the pandemic has not diminished the generosity of some benefactors; on the contrary, it has extended it and made it even more visible. For this reason, we have managed to realize some very simple signs that express Pope Francis' closeness and attention at this juncture.

With the significant support of *Roma Cares* and the generosity of *Elite Supermarkets*, we are currently sending 5000 packages of basic necessities to the families of about sixty parishes in Rome who, especially in this period, are in difficulty. Each box contains food of various kinds, from particularly prestigious brands, (pasta, rice, tomato sauce, oil, fine and coarse salt, flour, coffee, sugar, jam, tuna, cookies and chocolate), along with some masks and a holy card with a prayer by Pope Francis. I feel the duty of giving a special thanks to the CEO of Roma, Mr. Guido Fienga (here with us) for *Roma Cares* and to the Fedeli Family owner of *Elite Supermarkets* (here with us is Mr. Franco Fedeli, the Founder and Mr. Marco Conti, the Operative Director). In this regard, I would also like to highlight that the packaging and distribution of these boxes was made possible thanks to the work of a group of twenty young people currently waiting for employment.

In the same way, also this year, the pasta factory "La Molisana" has wanted to support our initiatives with 2.5 tons of their renowned pasta, which will be destined to various Family Shelters and Charitable Associations. It is important to mention that the *Société des Centres Commerciaux Italia s.r.l.* and the *Robert Halley Foundation* have also wanted to support the Holy Father's initiatives with their generosity in favor of the many poor people present in the city and assisted by many ecclesial institutions.

With the support of *UnipolSai Assicurazioni* we have sent the first consignment of 350,000 masks, destined for at least 15,000 students of different grades, particularly those from the large suburbs of the city, in order offer once again support to families and relieve them, at least, of the expense of these masks. This effort also hopes to be an invitation to our young students not to underestimate the risks of the pandemic, especially with behaviors that could be harmful once they return from school to their families with the presence of elderly people.

As can be seen, *The World Day of the Poor*, although limited in its initiatives, remains a date to which the Dioceses around the world look to in order to keep alive a sense of attention and fraternity towards the most marginalized and disadvantaged people. The *Pastoral Aid* prepared again this year to assist parishes and the different ecclesial institutions, can be regarded as a timely instrument so that this Day is not limited to charitable initiatives alone, but that these, be supported by personal and community prayer that can never be lacking in order for our witness to be complete and effective. As every year, in addition to the Italian edition printed by *Edizioni San Paolo*, the *Pastoral Aid* has been translated into five languages (English, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Polish) and its versions are

available online on the website of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization (pcpne.va). Different Churches have already given notice of their active participation in this Day, too, with the usual outreach efforts and with the participation from people's own homes in order to avoid the spread of the virus.

The words of Pope Francis in his Message express well the purpose of these initiatives. The Pope writes, "In everything you do, remember your end" (*Sir* 7:36)... These are the final words of this chapter of the book of Sirach. They can be understood in two ways. First, our lives will come to an end sooner or later. Remembering our common destiny can help lead to a life of concern for those poorer than ourselves or lacking the opportunities that were ours. Second, there is also an end or goal towards which each of us is tending... This is the ultimate goal of our journey, and nothing should distract us from it. The "end" of all our actions can only be love... This love is one of sharing, dedication and service, born of the realization that we were first loved and awakened to love. We see this in the way children greet their mother's smile and feel loved simply by virtue of being alive. Even a smile that we can share with the poor is a source of love and a way of spreading joy. An outstretched hand, then, can always be enriched by the smile of those who quietly and unassumingly offer to help, inspired only by the joy of living as one of Christ's disciples" (n.10). It is in this spirit that we are preparing to live this *Fourth World Day of the Poor*.