



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE "CIRCOLO SAN PIETRO"**

Hall of Popes

Thursday, 8 March 2007

Dear Friends,

Thank you for coming to this meeting, with which you wish to renew the sentiments of affection and devotion that bind your Sodality to the Successor of the Apostle Peter.

I offer you all my cordial greeting. I greet the members of the General Presidency of your praiseworthy Circle, and especially Don Leopoldo dei Duchi Torlonia, the President, to whom I also express my gratitude for his kind words on your behalf, describing your liturgical and charitable activities.

I extend my thoughts to your Chaplain, your families and all who work in various capacities in the activities you organize.

This annual meeting, which now has a long tradition, takes place in connection with the Feast of the Chair of St Peter in order to highlight your Circle's special fidelity to the Holy See - which you wish to emphasize - and to present to the Pope the Collection of the traditional Peter's Pence which you organize in the parishes and institutions of the Diocese of Rome.

The ancient collection of Peter's Pence, which in a certain way already existed in the early Christian Communities, stems from an awareness that every member of the faithful is also called to provide material support for the work of evangelization, and at the same time to go generously to the aid of the poor and needy, mindful of Jesus' words: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25: 40).

Thanks to the pooling of material resources, we read in the Acts of the Apostles, "There was not a

needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the Apostles' feet" (Acts 4: 34ff.); and further, "The disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea" (Acts 11: 29).

This ecclesial practice developed down the centuries, adapted to the different requirements of the times, and still continues today. In every diocese and in every parish and religious community, Peter's Pence are collected every year and sent to the centre of the Church to be redistributed as required by the needs and requests that the Pope receives from every corner of the earth.

There have been times in the Church's history when the financial support donated to the Successor of Peter by Christians turned out to be quite considerable, as can be clearly understood from what, for example, Blessed Pius IX wrote in his Encyclical *Saepe Venerabilis*, promulgated on 5 August 1871: "We received in greater abundance than usual the Peter's Pence with which the poor and the rich spare no efforts to come to the aid of the poverty made known to us; and in addition, there are the many, various and most noble gifts and a splendid tribute of Christian art and genius, particularly suited to highlighting the twofold, spiritual and regal power which God has conferred upon us" (*Ench. Enc.*, 2, n. 452, p. 609; in the *Tablet* 38 [26 Aug. 1871], 274).

In our time too, the Church continues to spread the Gospel and to cooperate in building a more fraternal and supportive humanity. And it is precisely thanks to [Peter's Pence](#) that she can accomplish her mission of evangelization and human advancement.

I am therefore grateful to you for your commitment in collecting the donations of the people of Rome, which are, as your President emphasized, a sign of their gratitude for the pastoral and charitable activity of the Successor of Peter.

I know that you are motivated by zeal and generosity: may the Lord reward you and make your ecclesial service fruitful, and may he also help you to implement every initiative of your Circle.

Among its projects, I would like in particular to recall the precious service you have been offering for more than six years to the Sacred Heart *Hospice*, where the daily presence of your volunteers is a comfort to the sick and their relatives: yours is a silent but especially eloquent witness of love for human life, which deserves attention and respect to its very last breath.

Dear friends, we are in the Lenten Season, during which the liturgy reminds us that together with the commitment to prayer and fasting we should combine attention to our brothers and sisters, especially those in difficulty, by going to their aid with gestures and acts of material and spiritual support.

Today, I repeat to you the invitation I addressed to every Christian in my Message for Lent, that is,

my hope that this liturgical season may be for everyone "a renewed experience of God's love given to us in Christ, a love that each day we, in turn, must 're-give' to our neighbour, especially to the one who suffers most and is in need" (*Message for Lent 2007*, 21 November 2006; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 21 February 2007, p. 7).

As I express once again my gratitude for your visit today, I encourage you to continue your charitable work enthusiastically, and your formal duty of welcoming the faithful in the Vatican Basilica and at the celebrations at which the Pope presides.

I entrust you to the motherly protection of Mary, whom you invoke as *Salus Populi Romani*. With these sentiments, as I assure you of my remembrance in prayer for you and for your initiatives, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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