



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE BRAZIL'S LENTEN
"CAMPAIGN OF FRATERNITY 2003"**

*To my Venerable Brother in the Episcopate
Bishop Jayme Henrique Chemello
President of the Bishops' Conference of Brazil*

"Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain wisdom of heart" (Ps 89 [90],12).

With special affection I greet the Bishops of Brazil and all the people of this beloved nation who, on Ash Wednesday, begin their journey towards Easter with the mandate for action from a new Campaign of Fraternity whose motto this year is: *"Life, Dignity and Hope"*.

The sincere call to reflect more deeply, during the Lenten season, on the topic of brotherly relations with the elderly, can be classified as "wisdom". The elderly are asked to live in their lives the plan that God has for each one, repeating with the Psalmist, "I do not turn aside from your ordinances, for you have taught me" (Ps 118[119],102). For their part, the certainty that the span of life reaches a limit induces them to weight all things in the light of divine truth, recognizing the relativity of every other reality. Every human life, despite its limitations and sufferings, always retains its real value and must be accepted until it comes to its end. For the Christian, it "can be seen ... as a 'passage', a bridge between one life and another, between the fragile and uncertain joy of this earth to that fullness of joy which the Lord holds in store for his faithful servants" (*Letter to the Elderly*, n. 16).

The Church, expert in humanity, out of obedience to the Redeemer's mandate, points the way to our spiritual and human good, a way of reconciliation and penance that passes through personal conversion and solidarity with one's neighbour. Today, the special need for this solidarity with the elderly is due to the prolonging of the average lifespan which medical progress has made possible.

Old age has always existed, but today it has special features due to the greater life expectancy for everyone. It is therefore necessary to plan immediately to help these brothers and sisters. This demands a change of mentality: there is an urgent need to replace the utilitarian and materialistic culture that calculates a person's worth on the basis of what he produces and consumes, with a culture that recognizes the "absolute" value of each person, regardless of his ability or productivity.

I wish and hope that the social and health-care programmes for the elderly may be revived and expanded, not only by public and private institutions, but also by diocesan programmes of pastoral care. I think of all the elderly of Brazil, of widowers and widows, of ageing men and women religious, and of my dear brothers in the priesthood. I send my warm embrace and encouragement to those who are living in homes for the elderly, in nursing homes, hospitals, and especially to the poor, so that they may not lose heart. If God permits suffering because of illness, loneliness or for any other reason, "he always gives us the grace and strength to unite ourselves with greater love to the sacrifice of his Son and to share ever more fully in his plan of salvation" (*ibid.*, n. 13).

I impart to all our beloved elderly Brazilians to show appreciation for their valuable presence in society and as a pledge of abundant favours from God, a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 4 January 2003.

JOHN PAUL II