



Press Conference



Press Conference (abbreviated)

World Day of the Poor 2017

Press Office, June 13, 2017

On November 13 of last year, while the Doors of Mercy were closing in all of the cathedrals of the world, Pope Francis celebrated in St. Peter's Basilica the Jubilee for the socially marginalized. In his homily, Pope Francis explained, "Today, though, when we speak of exclusion, we immediately think of concrete people, not useless objects but precious persons... In light of this, I would like today to be the World Day of the Poor."

However, this final sentence was not in the Holy Father's prepared text. As he looked out upon the thousands of poor who were present for the Eucharistic celebration and who had participated in the activities of the previous days, Pope Francis had spontaneously pronounced it. Over the course of those days, these men and women had expressed their challenges, along with their hearts' desires. The Pope had embraced them with emotion and intensity. It was their expressions and their tears that inspired him to raise his eyes from his text and to announce his desire for a World Day of the Poor. This desire would soon become a reality, when in the signing of the letter *Misericordia et misera*, Pope Francis added at the conclusion: "I had the idea that, as yet another tangible sign of this Extraordinary Holy Year, the entire Church might celebrate, on the Thirty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, the *World Day of the Poor*. This would be the worthiest way to prepare for the celebration of the Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, who identified with the little ones and the poor and who will judge us on our works of mercy (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46). It would be a day to help

communities and each of the baptized to reflect on how poverty is at the very heart of the Gospel and that, as long as Lazarus lies at the door of our homes (cf. *Lk* 16:19-21), there can be no justice or social peace. This Day will also represent a genuine form of new evangelization (cf. *Mt* 11:5) which can renew the face of the Church as She perseveres in her perennial activity of pastoral conversion and witness to mercy” (n. 21).

It is within this context that the **Message** for the **I World Day of the Poor** is to be read. This Day will be celebrated throughout the Church next November 19, the XXXIII Sunday of Ordinary Time. The Holy Father notes in the *Message*: “To the World Days instituted by my Predecessors, which are already a tradition in the life of our communities, I wish to add this one, which adds to them an exquisitely evangelical fullness, that is, Jesus’ preferential love for the poor” (n. 6).

This will be a day on which the entire Christian community must be attentive to the hand of the poor, the weak, the men and women whose dignity is so often trampled upon. The *Message* recalls the Biblical expression from the First Letter of St. John: *Love not in word but in deed*. This **motto** will serve to shape the meaning of this world celebration. “Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth” (1 Jn. 3:18). With these words of the Evangelist, the Holy Father begins his *Message*. The exhortation expresses an imperative from which no Christian is exempt. It is essential to recall the opposition between action—a concrete service to those marginalized—and the emptiness often hidden only by words.

In the *Message*, presently available in eight languages (Italian, French, English, German, Polish, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic), the Holy Father places a great emphasis upon *reciprocity*. The poor are touched by the tenderness and the mercy of God through those who desire to meet the true face of Christ. In the same way, those who have lost their dignity and have been marginalized, those victimized by abuse, provoke Christians to rediscover the sense of evangelical poverty that they are to live out each day.

The nature of reciprocity is expressed in the *logo* for the World Day of the Poor. One notes an open door and two persons on the roadside. Both persons extend a hand: One is seeking assistance and the other intends to provide it. In fact, it is difficult to recognize which of the two is truly poor. Or rather, both are poor. The one who extends the hand in order to enter is asking for a sharing, while the one extending the hand to assist is invited to exit in order to share. Each of the two hands are extended to meet the other and both have something to offer. The two arms express solidarity, inviting the other to exit the door and to meet. The poor is able to enter the house, once it is understood that the assistance is in the form of a sharing. The words of Pope Francis written in the *Message* express this dynamic: “Blessed are the open hands that ask nothing in exchange, with no “ifs” or “buts” or “maybes”: they are hands that call down God’s blessing upon their brothers and sisters” (n. 5). The invitation of the Holy Father is addressed to the entire Church, as well as to all men and women of good will. All are urged to hear the cries of the poor for help. Regardless of one’s religion, the color of one’s skin, and the country from which one originates, all are asked not to turn their gaze elsewhere.

More concretely, the particular Churches are invited to discover the most fitting ways to give continuity with those forms of assistance already in place and which mark the expansive reality of volunteerism. Pope Francis is calling each person to make every effort, especially in the week preceding, “to create moments of encounter and friendship, solidarity and concrete assistance” (n. 7). He is also asking that the poor and the volunteers participate together in the Holy Eucharist on Sunday, and then following to welcome the poor “as honored guests at our table.” In order to assist priests and volunteers in the fruitful celebration of these days the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization has prepared a *Pastoral Resource* that will be available in September.

Pope Francis will be directly involved in the celebration of this Day as he will be presiding at Holy Mass which will be celebrated in St. Peter’s Basilica with many poor and volunteers. For the

volunteers there will be a preparatory Vigil to be held on Saturday, November 18 at the Basilica of San Lorenzo fuori le Mura, which commemorates the great Roman saint who elevated the figure of the poor as the true and unique “treasure” of the Church. His martyrdom is a perpetual witness of his service of charity.

At the conclusion of his *Message*, Pope Francis expresses his hope that this World Day “should become a powerful appeal to our consciences as believers, allowing us to grow in the conviction that sharing with the poor enables us to understand the deepest truth of the Gospel. The poor are not a problem: they are a resource from which to draw as we strive to accept and practice in our lives the essence of the Gospel” (n. 9).