

Thirty Days of Reflection with Pope Benedict XVI

In a busy world where it often becomes easy to separate work for social justice from the experience of God's presence in prayer, this resource is intended to deepen your spirituality of justice over the thirty day period. Choose a time each day to engage in five or ten minutes of this "retreat in daily life." Begin on Day 1 and reflect on Benedict's quotes as well as the reflection question(s). Finally, use the simple prayer at the end of each page as a starting point for your own prayer and quiet time. Let the Spirit move!

- Education for Justice, July 2006

Prayer of Pope Benedict XVI

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
you have given the world its true light,
Jesus, your Son – the Son of God.
You abandoned yourself completely
to God's call
and thus became a wellspring
of the goodness which flows forth from him.
Show us Jesus. Lead us to him.
Teach us to know and love him,
so that we too can become
capable of true love
and be fountains of living water
in the midst of a thirsting world.

From Deus Caritas Est (God is Love), Dec. 2005

Day 1: Standing on the Side of the Poor

As Isaiah proclaimed, \“For thus says he who is high and exalted, living eternally, whose name is the Holy One: On high I dwell, and in holiness, and with the crushed and dejected in spirit, to revive the spirits of the dejected, to revive the hearts of the crushed\” (Isaiah 57:15). **God chooses, therefore, to be with the weak, with victims, with the last: This is made known to all kings, so that they will know what their options should be in the governance of nations.** Of course, he does not just say it to kings and to all governments, **but to all of us, as we also must know which option we must choose: to be on the side of the humble, the last, the poor and the weak.**

Pope Benedict XVI, Commentary on Psalm 137(138): God “Cares for the Lowly,” Dec. 7, 2005

Reflections

Take a moment to reflect on the choices you make in your daily life - in your workplace, at school, in your purchasing choices, in your conversations. Are you someone who truly stands on the side of the poor?

Can you think of any instances in which the leaders of your democratically elected government (local or national) have or have not stood on the side of the poor? Are you active in encouraging them to create policies that lift up the weakest among us?

Prayer

God of the lowly, God of the weak, God of all of us . . . You call us to stand most of all on the side of the poor. Reveal to me the ways in which I am in solidarity with the weakest in my society. Reveal also the ways in which my actions may perpetuate their poverty. Help me to stand, with you, on their side.

Day 2: Loving My Neighbor is Loving God

The unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour is emphasized. One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbour or hate him altogether. Saint John's words should rather be interpreted to mean that **love of neighbour is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God.**

Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est (God is Love), #16

Reflection

Which of my neighbors do I have the most difficult time loving? Do I love equally my nearby neighbors and those far away?

What kinds of actions does real love require? What would be true love's reaction to suffering and injustice?

Prayer

I am sometimes blind, Lord. I realize that in closing my eyes to my neighbor, I also close my eyes to you. Help me to open my eyes to my neighbors in all the world, that in doing so, I may truly see you.

Day 3: One God is Present to Us All

The Church hopes to continue an open and sincere dialogue with believers of other religions, in search of the authentic good of man and society. The meeting in truth between believers of different religions is an **imperative challenge for the future of peace in the world, and this calls for much perseverance.** To surmount the reciprocal ignorance and prejudices, it is important to create bonds of trust between persons, sharing in particular daily life and work in common, so that the free expression of different confessions is not a reason for mutual exclusion, but rather an occasion to learn to live, each one respecting the other's identity. *Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the new ambassador from Algeria to the Holy See, Dec. 1, 2005*

Reflection

How do you see people of other religions? Are you able to recognize the presence of the one God across lines of religion? What can you learn from other religions?

Have you made efforts to counter the "ignorance and prejudices" that often create divisions between people of different faiths? How might the world be different if we could truly engage in "open and sincere dialogue with believers of other religions"?

Prayer

The world has experienced too much violence between religions, with God's name wrongly evoked to justify killing. Help us to be uniters, God, instead of dividers. Show us how to bring your grace and healing to the broken relationships between the world's peoples.

Day 4: The Church is Close to Victims of War

The principal victims of war are always the people whose lives are so badly disrupted by violence and destruction. Many are forced to flee from their homes, or to seek refuge in neighboring states. The Church is close to refugees and displaced persons, “not only with her pastoral presence and material support, but also with her commitment to defend their human dignity” (cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 505).

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Eritrea’s new ambassador to the Holy See, Dec. 4, 2005

Reflection

Reflect for a moment on the lives of people affected by fighting all over the world - in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Somalia, Uganda, Colombia, Haiti, Afghanistan, Iraq, and many other places.

Take a moment, in silence, to share God’s pain for “the principle victims of war”: women and children who are raped; forcibly recruited child soldiers; people who are mutilated as a fear tactic; orphans left behind; refugees and internally displaced persons; and of course, victims of attacks, bombings, and landmines.

Prayer

As part of the Church, which is called to support victims of war and “defend their human dignity,” I pray for vision as to how I might personally participate in the struggle to cry out against war and violence around the world.

Day 5: Opening Our Arms to Migrants

[B]elievers are called to open their arms and their hearts to every person, from whatever nation they come, allowing the authorities responsible for public life to enforce the relevant laws held to be appropriate for a healthy coexistence.

Continually stimulated to witness the love that the Lord Jesus taught, **Christians must open their hearts especially to the lowly and the poor**, in whom Christ himself is present in a singular way. Acting in this way, they manifest the most qualifying characteristic of their own Christian identity: the love that Christ lived and continually transmits to the Church through the Gospel and the sacraments. Obviously, it is to be hoped that Christians who emigrate to nations with an Islamic majority will also be welcomed and their religious identity respected.

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Assembly of Council for Migrants, June 7, 2006

Reflection

The U.S. government is caught up in an intense debate about the immigration system in the U.S. Our European neighbors are also in great need of immigration reform, as European immigration laws become more and more restrictive even as more and more people flee poverty, oppression, and conflict. Take a moment to visit the website of the U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Justice for Immigrants campaign (www.justiceforimmigrants.org). What do the U.S. Bishops feel must be included in “comprehensive immigration reform”? How do our current system and the proposals in the House and the Senate measure up?

Prayer

Loving God, you call us to be a welcoming people and to recognize our sisters and brothers around the world as our equals. Help us to call our leaders to build an immigration system which is just and comprehensive and which respects the human dignity of each migrating person.

Day 6: Living for Ourselves or for Others

Then we will no longer be content to scrape a living just for ourselves, but we will see where and how we are needed. **Living and acting thus, we will soon realize that it is much better to be useful and at the disposal of others than to be concerned only with the comforts that are offered to us.** I know that you as young people have great aspirations, that you want to pledge yourselves to build a better world. Let others see this, let the world see it, since this is exactly the witness that the world expects from the disciples of Jesus Christ; in this way, and through your love above all, the world will be able to discover the star that we follow as believers.

Pope Benedict XVI, "Let Us Go Forward With Christ!" Homily at closing Mass of World Youth Day, Cologne, Aug. 21, 2005

Reflection

Is my life mostly about myself or about others? Does my own personal success and comfort take precedent over the collective good of those around me? How does my inner spirit feel when I am self-centered? When I reach out to others? Can I feel God's spirit moving me to change ways that I act and think?

Prayer

Creator God, as St. Augustine expressed, our souls will be restless until they rest in you. Show us how to seek you with our entire beings and to give ourselves selflessly to all others, who are made in your image.

Day 7: Holding Up the Poor in the Age of Globalization

In the era of globalization, **it is important that political policies should not be guided mainly or solely by economic considerations or by the search for higher profits** or a heedless use of the planet's resources to the detriment of the people, especially those who are the least privileged, at the risk of jeopardizing the world's future in the long term. . . I therefore encourage the Leaders of nations and all people of good will to commit themselves with ever greater determination to building a free, brotherly and supportive world, **where attention to people takes precedence over mere economic aspects.** It is our duty to accept responsibility for one another and for the functioning of the world as a whole, so that it cannot be said, as Cain did in answer to God's question in the Book of the Genesis: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to ambassadors from Australia, India, Chad, Cape Verde and Moldova, May 18, 2006

Reflection

Consider Cain's question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" How would the community you live in answer this question? How would greater society answer?

Consider:

- the capitalistic system under which we live, which encourages the individual pursuit of wealth
- the spread of globalization, in which knowledge, culture, and goods and services are traveling around the world more quickly than ever before. Yet, the poorest can often be hurt by the rapid changes, and the wealth gap has been increasing in many parts of the world.

How can Pope Benedict XVI's words help us to address the challenges of globalization?

Prayer

Keep always in the forefront of our minds, Living God, an attentiveness to people over profit. Help us to remind our leaders and policymakers how the poorest are impacted by laws and policies. Show us how to always stand for the option for the poor and vulnerable.

Day 8: Disarmament for the Well-Being of the Poor

The truth of peace requires that all - whether those governments which openly or secretly possess nuclear arms, or those planning to acquire them - agree to change their course by clear and firm decisions, and strive for a progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament. The resources which would be saved could then be employed in projects of development capable of benefiting all their people, especially the poor.

In this regard, **one can only note with dismay the evidence of a continuing growth in military expenditure and the flourishing arms trade**, while the political and juridic process established by the international community for promoting disarmament is bogged down in general indifference. **How can there ever be a future of peace when investments are still made in the production of arms and in research aimed at developing new ones?** It can only be hoped that the international community will find the wisdom and courage to take up once more, jointly and with renewed conviction, the process of disarmament, and thus concretely ensure the right to peace enjoyed by every individual and every people. . . **The first to benefit from a decisive choice for disarmament will be the poor countries**, which rightly demand, after having heard so many promises, the concrete implementation of their right to development.

Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, Dec. 13, 2005

Reflection

How is Pope Benedict XVI correct in his assessment that “the first to benefit from a decisive choice for disarmament will be the poor countries”? How could money now used for weapons be used to instead benefit the poor?

Are there any ways I live “violently” instead of peacefully? Do I speak, think, or act in violent ways? In my heart, am I truly dedicated to living peacefully?

Prayer

We hope for a peaceful world, realizing that this cannot be the reality until we reject dependence on violent means to solve conflict, both in the policy realm and in our own lives. Help us to reject violence, God, so that we and our world may experience your peace.

Day 9: Working Tirelessly for Unity

With full awareness, therefore, at the beginning of his ministry in the Church of Rome which Peter bathed in his blood, Peter’s current successor takes on as his primary task **the duty to work tirelessly to rebuild the full and visible unity of all Christ’s followers.**

Pope Benedict XVI, First message from the Sistine Chapel, April 20, 2005

Reflection

When I think of, see, or interact with my Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Orthodox, and other brothers and sisters, do I celebrate our unity in Christ? Or, do I distance myself from them through my attitude and actions? Am I “work[ing] tirelessly to rebuild the full and visible unity” of Christ’s church?

Prayer

Christ Jesus, our Church has violently sailed a sea of division, misunderstanding, and intolerance for many years. We especially lift up those places in which many people have died as a result of this intolerance, such as Ireland. We pray that we might be a calming presence of understanding and tolerance in our world, lovingly working to unite instead of divide.

Day 10: God Does Not Condone Violence

Let us cry out to God, with all our hearts, at the present hour, when new misfortunes befall us, when all the forces of darkness seem to issue anew from human hearts: whether it is the abuse of God's name as a means of justifying senseless violence against innocent persons, or the cynicism which refuses to acknowledge God and ridicules faith in him.

Pope Benedict XVI, Prayer at Auschwitz concentration camp, May 28, 2006

Reflection

Choose one of the many atrocities that impact our world: poverty, genocide, terrorism, environmental destruction, human trafficking, war . . .

Now, imagine God's reaction to the atrocity.

Prayer

God, we cry out *with* you in the face of destruction and death in our world. Help us to reflect and experience your compassion, in solidarity with our sisters and brothers around the world. Help us to be moved by your pain, to condemn all forms of violence, and to take action to end others' pain.

Day 11: The Eucharist Transforms Us

What is happening? How can Jesus distribute his Body and his Blood? By making the bread into his Body and the wine into his Blood, he anticipates his death, he accepts it in his heart and he transforms it into an action of love. What on the outside is simply brutal violence, from within becomes an act of total self-giving love. **This is the substantial transformation which was accomplished at the Last Supper and was destined to set in motion a series of transformations leading ultimately to the transformation of the world** when God will be all in all (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:28). **In their hearts, people always and everywhere have somehow expected a change, a transformation of the world.** Here now is the central act of transformation that alone can truly renew the world: **Violence is transformed into love, and death into life.**

Since this act transmutes death into love, death as such is already conquered from within, the Resurrection is already present in it. Death is, so to speak, mortally wounded, so that it can no longer have the last word. To use an image well known to us today, this is like inducing nuclear fission in the very heart of being — **the victory of love over hatred, the victory of love over death. Only this intimate explosion of good conquering evil can then trigger off the series of transformations that little by little will change the world.**

Pope Benedict XVI, "Let Us Go Forward With Christ!" Homily of Pope Benedict XVI at closing Mass of World Youth Day, Cologne, Aug. 21, 2005

Reflection

The Eucharist sets into motion the conquering of death, the transformation of violence. In the Eucharist, we sense hope and victory. In the Eucharist, we are ourselves transformed so that we can go out into the world in order to transform.

Prayer

Jesus, touch me and transform me as I receive your body and blood. Help me to experience your miraculous victory over death in my own life and move me to bring this experience into a world in need.

Day 12: The Social Doctrine of the Church Helps to Guide Us

As you rightly noted in that Statement, **responsibility for the common good demands that all members of the body politic work together in laying firm moral and spiritual foundations for the future of the nation.** Through the publication of the Statement and your most recent Pastoral Letter *The Cry of the Poor*, **you yourselves have brought the wisdom of the Gospel and the rich heritage of the Church's social doctrine to bear upon the thinking and practical judgements** of the faithful both in their daily lives and in their efforts to act as upright members of the community. . . In your preaching and teaching the faithful should be able to hear **the voice of the Lord himself, a voice that speaks with authority of what is right and true, of peace and justice, of love and reconciliation**, a voice that can console them in the midst of their troubles and show them the way forward in hope.

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of Zimbabwe, July 6, 2005

Reflection

The social doctrine of the Church is intended to be used as a guide by the Church's followers to help us make "social judgments," inform our positions on policies that impact the good of society, particularly the poor and vulnerable, and ultimately, to help us transform our society's structures.

Have you allowed yourself to be transformed by God through "the wisdom of the Gospel and the rich heritage of the Church's social doctrine"? Are you committed to learning about and teaching others about the rich social tradition of the Catholic church?

Prayer

We long to hear your voice, Lord, "a voice that speaks with authority of what is right and true, of peace and justice, of love and reconciliation." Help us to hear this voice through the Gospel and through the Church's social teaching, that we might be transformed.

Day 13: The Scandal of Underdevelopment

Enlightened by this Paschal truth, the Church knows that if we are to promote development in its fullness, our own "gaze" upon mankind has to be measured against that of Christ. In fact, **it is quite impossible to separate the response to people's material and social needs from the fulfillment of the profound desires of their hearts.** This has to be emphasized all the more in today's rapidly changing world, in which our responsibility towards the poor emerges with ever greater clarity and urgency. My venerable Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, accurately described **the scandal of underdevelopment as an outrage against humanity.** In this sense, in the Encyclical "Populorum Progressio," he denounced "the lack of material necessities for those who are without the minimum essential for life, the moral deficiencies of those who are mutilated by selfishness" and "oppressive social structures, whether due to the abuses of ownership or to the abuses of power, to the exploitation of workers or to unjust transactions" (ibid., 21) . . . An important litmus test for the success of their efforts is religious liberty, understood not simply as the freedom to proclaim and celebrate Christ, but also the opportunity to contribute to the building of a world enlivened by charity.

Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent, 2006, Jan. 31, 2006

Reflection

We are complex creations, with many aspects to our personhood: we have spiritual, social, physical, and psychological needs that must be met in order for us to develop as human beings. Our physical needs are the most basic of these. Why does Pope Benedict XVI call the underdevelopment that prevents the fulfillment of basic physical needs a "scandal" and an "outrage against humanity"? Benedict says that the Church must look at the world with the "gaze" of Christ. How might doing so transform the way we as individuals and as nations act in the world?

Prayer

Transforming God, we look to a world in which all might have the opportunity to creatively contribute to the building of a better world. We pray for the grace to see the underdevelopment which prevents the participation of all as a true scandal which cannot be tolerated.

Day 14: Hunger is Structural

[T]he celebration of World Food Day reminds us that **hunger and malnutrition are, unfortunately, among the most serious scandals that still affect the life of the human family**, which makes all the more urgent the action undertaken . . . The millions of people whose very lives are threatened, because they are deprived of a minimum of the necessary nourishment, **call for the attention of the International Community, because we all have the duty to take care of our brothers**. In fact, famine does not depend only on geographic and climatic situations or on unfavorable circumstances linked to harvests. **It is also caused by man himself and by his egoism which is translated in deficiencies in the social organization, the rigidity of economic structures too often geared only to profit, and also practices against human life and ideological systems that reduce the person, deprived of his fundamental dignity, to be but an instrument.**

Pope Benedict XVI, Message to the director general of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, Oct. 16, 2005

Reflection

The Church recognizes that hunger is a structural problem; enough food is produced to feed every person, but some countries overconsume and engage in certain practices which put developing countries at a disadvantage. For example, the U.S. and Europe pay billions of dollars in subsidies to their farmers each year, a practice which developing countries cannot afford. Take a few minutes to learn more about the situation by reading the fact sheet at <http://www.educationforjustice.org/bin/view.fpl/1200/article/3716.html>.

Prayer

Our faith calls us to evaluate the systems and structures of the world based on how well the dignity of the human person is respected. God of justice, help us to advocate for systems that value people over profit.

Day 15: Not a Clash of Civilizations

Terrorism is irrational. **There is no clash of civilizations, but small groups of fanatics . . . [T]he dialogue between religions which have Abraham as a Father is important.** We must ask God to reinforce this will and hope that it will be much stronger than violence.

Pope Benedict XVI, Statement on July 21, 2005

Reflection

The “clash of civilizations” theory sees the Muslim East and the Christian West as inherently opposed to one another and unable to be reconciled. Our faith challenges this belief, reminding us that we are all sisters and brothers with one God present to all of us. Where have you heard the “clash of civilizations” theory or similar ideas recently? How does such a belief influence attitudes and policies in the U.S. ? How can you promote belief in the common humanity of all people and urge reconciliation instead of distancing?

Prayer

God, help me to be in touch with my perceptions and attitudes toward my Muslim brothers and sisters. In this world of conflict, help us to see past the extremism promoted by a minority, and to unite with our Muslim brothers and sisters as a human family worshipping one God.

Day 16: The Faithful in Public Life

The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. **As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity.** So they cannot relinquish their participation “in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good.” **The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly,** respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility. Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as “social charity.”

Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est (God is Love), #29

Reflection

How am I doing in living up to my responsibility as a Christian and a citizen to “take part in public life” and to help to “configure social life correctly” so that the common good is promoted in our economic, social, legislative, administrative, and cultural structures, practices, and institutions?

Prayer

God, help me to take to heart Pope Benedict XVI’s call to “take part in public life in a personal capacity.” I know that I cannot cast aside the political realm as “too complicated” or “too depressing” because I am responsible for the well-being of my human family. Give me hope and strength, and propel me to take part in “configur[ing] society correctly.”

Day 17: Christ’s Light Can Help us Build a Better World

Men and women of today, humanity come of age yet often still so frail in mind and will, let the Child of Bethlehem take you by the hand! Do not fear; put your trust in him! **The life-giving power of his light is an incentive for building a new world order based on just ethical and economic relationships.**

Pope Benedict XVI, Christmas Message, Dec. 25, 2005

Reflection

Pope Benedict XVI says, “Do not fear!”

In what ways am I afraid? In what ways do I despair? Do I believe that I cannot make a difference? Have I lost hope that a better world is possible? Are there situations in my own life on which I have “given up”?

Prayer

Increase my faith, God! Help me to trust in you as I step out of my comfort zone in my own life and in the world around me. Show me how to receive the “life-giving power” of Christ’s light, and to pass it on to others.

Day 18: The Disfigurement of War

News of war is arriving from every part of the world. This morning **I would like to make a new appeal to the leaders of nations and to all people of good will to cooperate in order to put an end to the violence that disfigures humanity and jeopardizes the growth of peoples and the hopes of numerous populations.** Without the commitment to peace by one and all, creating an atmosphere of pacification and a spirit of reconciliation in all social milieus beginning with the family, it will not be possible to advance on the path of a peaceful society.

Pope Benedict XVI, Message to Eleven New Ambassadors to the Holy See, Dec. 1, 2005

Reflection

The news shows us up-close images of families mourning the deaths of loved ones in Iraq and Afghanistan; the destruction of suicide bombings; tortured prisoners; rape victims; poverty; and people living in terror. What are we to make of it all? Pope Benedict XVI cries out against the terror of war and asks world leaders to truly become committed to peace and reconciliation. As citizens of one of the most powerful nations in the world, we must remind our leaders that world peace will not be possible unless our nation makes it a priority. The Pope encourages us to begin in our own families but also to look beyond them, to the world community.

Prayer

Humanity, “disfigured” by war, cries out for peace. We cry out to you, God, from a broken world. Enlighten us with a new commitment to peace.

Day 19: Seeking the Common Good

Indeed, it is not enough to opt for peace or collaboration between nations in order to achieve them. Again, each person must be actively committed and concerned not only with the interests of those close to him or her or with one specific class of society to the detriment of the general interest, **but must seek first of all the common good of the country’s people and, on a wider scale, of the whole of humanity.**

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to ambassadors from Australia, India, Chad, Cape Verde and Moldova, May 18, 2006

Reflection

As human beings living our daily lives, it is easy to become inwardly focused, concentrating only on our own lives and the well-being of our families. How are you called to see beyond your immediate surroundings, to work for the common good of both your country’s people and that of the entire world?

How is one to balance the well-being of one’s country and that of the entire world, if the two are in conflict? When might this be the case?

Prayer

Creator God, you have blessed us with both inner selves and outer beings. In the same way, you call us to look near to us and far away, to bring goodness and peace to our own homes and communities and to the world. Give us the wisdom to do both well.

Day 20: Rural Farmers, Life Providers

It must not be forgotten that the vulnerability of rural areas has significant repercussions on the subsistence of small farmers and their families if they are denied access to the market. A consistent course of action would call for recognizing the essential role of the rural family as a guardian of values and a natural agent of solidarity in relationships between the generations. Consequently, support should also be given to the role of rural women and at the same time to children for whom not only nutrition but also basic education must be assured.

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Participants in the U.N. Food Conference, Nov. 24, 2005

Reflection

In the U.S., smaller farmers have suffered as a few large firms, receiving millions of dollars in subsidies from the U.S. government, have bought up a large percentage of agricultural production in the U.S. Small farmers in developing countries also suffer as large producers from the U.S. and Europe who receive subsidies from their governments sell their products at cheap prices in developing countries' markets. Historically, farming has provided a livelihood for billions of people around the world. As their means of survival is threatened, we must consider whether our governments' policies promote the dignity of farmers and what changes should be made to ensure the protection of their livelihoods.

Prayer

Many of us, somewhere down the line, come from rural pasts. Our ancestors were farmers who worked with the earth and grew food to support the existence of their families and communities. Let us recognize the sacredness of this occupation, and support the continued existence of small farmers in our world.

Day 21: Respect for Difference

Tolerance and respect for difference . . . derive from an appreciation of the innate dignity and the inalienable rights of every human person. . . Above all, it directs us toward a proper understanding of human freedom which can never be realized independently of God but only in cooperation with his loving plan for humanity (cf. "Homily for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception," Dec. 8, 2005). **Tolerance and respect for difference, if they are truly to benefit society, need to be built upon the rock of an authentic understanding of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God and called to a share in his divine life.**

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Francis Campbell, the new ambassador of Great Britain to the Holy See, Dec. 23, 2005

Reflection

When I think of, see, or interact with my Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Native American, and other brothers and sisters, do I celebrate our unity under one God of all? Do I embrace the religious and other differences in order to learn from them? Do I really believe that God desires for us to be of one human family?

Prayer

Grant us great respect, O God, for the many ways of praising you that are present on this earth. Touch us with the understanding that you are big enough to include the worship of all peoples.

Day 22: Rights: Universal, Inviolable, Inalienable

Prior to any positive law emanated by States, **such rights are universal, inviolable and inalienable, and must be recognized as such by everyone, especially by the civil authorities who are called to promote them and guarantee that they are respected.** Although in modern culture, the concept of ‘human nature’ seems to have been lost, the fact remains that human rights cannot be understood without presupposing that man, in his very being, is the bearer of values and norms that must be rediscovered and reaffirmed, not invented and imposed in a subjective and arbitrary manner.

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Members of the International Theological Commission, Dec. 1, 2005

Reflection

Make a list of all the basic rights with which all human beings are endowed. How well are our “civil authorities” doing in promoting and guaranteeing these rights? When a basic right has been violated or is not able to be fulfilled, what action should the government take? Consider:

- Homeless persons
- The rights of prisoners
- AIDS victims
- Immigrants and refugees

Prayer

Jesus said, “Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.” (Mt. 25:40)

When a mother cannot feed her child,

Let it be as if we could not feed our own children.

When a person is imprisoned and denied access to fair trial,

Let us feel the injustice as if we ourselves were imprisoned and denied trial.

When a person is mercilessly tortured,

Let our bones ache with their pain, as if it were our own.

When the rights of others are denied in any way, let us be as horrified as if it were our own rights being denied.

Amen.

Day 23: The Scourge of AIDS and the International Community

Tomorrow, 1 December, is World AIDS Day, a United Nations initiative planned to call attention to the scourge of AIDS and **to invite the International Community to a renewed commitment in the work of prevention and supportive assistance** to those afflicted. **The figures published are alarming!**

Closely following Christ’s example, the Church has always considered care of the sick as an integral part of her mission. I therefore encourage the many initiatives promoted especially by the Ecclesial Community to rout this disease, and I feel close to persons with AIDS and their families, invoking for them the help and comfort of the Lord.

Pope Benedict XVI, Appeal of the Holy Father, Nov. 30, 2005

Reflection

The statistics are shocking: Five people die of AIDS each minute. 8,000 people die of AIDS each day. It is truly a global emergency. The world has known about AIDS since the 1980s. Why, then, is it still claiming so many lives? In the face of such a crisis, the international community must do more, as Pope Benedict XVI exhorts. What can you do to be in solidarity with AIDS victims and to work for more resources to fight the disease ravaging so many lives?

Prayer

Healer of the Sick, help us to be alarmed by the AIDS crisis - alarmed to the bone - that we might act as a caring world to end the misery of the individuals, families, orphans, and societies who are ravaged by this terrible disease.

Day 24: Injustice is a Moral Issue

Work tirelessly so that the Gospel will penetrate ever more profoundly in the heart and life of believers, **inviting the faithful to assume increasingly their responsibility in society, in particular in the field of the economy and politics, with a moral sense nourished by the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Church.**

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of Rwanda, May 22, 2005

Reflection

As believers, we come to the economic and political realms guided by a moral sense which demands the protection of the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. To our leaders and politicians, we bring the sense that:

- hungry people in our own country and abroad is a moral issue
- 46 million Americans without health insurance is a moral issue
- paying workers a just wage so that they can provide for their families is a moral issue
- 8,000 people dying of AIDS each day is a moral issue
- destruction of God's environment is a moral issue

Prayer

Invigorate us with a moral sense that our nation and our world must be made more just, Lord. Nourish us with the Gospel and your teaching and help us to assume our responsibility to transform society.

Day 25: Destruction in Christ's Birthplace

Faced, on the one hand, with blind violence that provokes appalling massacres and, on the other, with the threat of a worsening of the crisis which over the last few days has become even more dramatic, what is needed is justice and a serious and credible commitment to peace, which unfortunately are nowhere to be seen. May no one evade their duty to construct peaceful coexistence, recognizing that all men are brothers, whatever the people to which they belong.

I appeal to Israeli and Palestinian leaders that, with the generous help of the international community, they may seek responsibly for that negotiated end to the conflict, which alone can ensure the peace to which their people aspire.

Pope Benedict XVI, Addresses on July 2, 2006 and June 30, 2006

Reflection

Recently, violence has once again plagued the birthplace of our Lord. In response to Israeli occupation, Palestinian militants kidnap an Israeli soldier, which causes the Israeli military to invade further into Palestinian territory, which causes the militants to fire a missile, which causes the Israeli military to shell civilians and capture government officials, which causes more violence and on and on. When will it end?

The Pope realizes that without justice and a real commitment to peace, the violence will only worsen, with more and more human victims. What does the Pope recommend? Will those in power respond? How can you play a role?

Prayer

Jesus, you cried out against violence and hate, yet violence and hate still surround so many children today. Your innocent children, whom you love, live in anxiety and fear. We pray for the courage to stand up for these beloved children and to work to end violence.

Day 26: Toward a United Humanity

May [Christ's] love guide every people on earth and strengthen their common consciousness of being a "family" called to foster relationships of trust and mutual support. **A united humanity will be able to confront the many troubling problems of the present time: from the menace of terrorism to the humiliating poverty in which millions of human beings live, from the proliferation of weapons to the pandemics and the environmental destruction** which threatens the future of our planet.

Pope Benedict XVI, Christmas Message, Dec. 25, 2005

Reflection

What would a "united humanity" look like?

Do you think of people in other parts of the world as part of your family? Are they included in "we" or are they a "they" or "other"?

Why is poverty a humiliation for both those who experience it and those who allow it?

Prayer

The environment is *our* environment.

Terrorism affects *our* lives and it springs from *our* societies.

Weapons proliferation threatens *all of us*.

Change our mentality, God.

Change the way we think about our earth and our relationships with one another.

Let us see problems as the problems of us all.

Help us see the future as the hope of us all.

Day 27: We Give to the Poor What is Already Theirs

Especially in Africa, many have drawn comfort from the aid resolutions taken at July's Gleneagles summit, when the G-8 Group met under the presidency of Great Britain. I pray that this effective solidarity with our suffering brothers and sisters will be maintained and deepened in years to come. In the words of my venerable predecessor, Pope Gregory the Great, **"When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours.** More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice" (Pastoral Rule, 3:21, quoted in Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 184).

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Francis Campbell, the new ambassador of Great Britain to the Holy See, Dec. 23, 2005

Reflection

Do you see the gifts you have been given and the prosperity of our nation as our own, or do the poor in other nations have a claim to these resources equal to our own claim on them? What would Catholic Social Teaching say? Is this attitude the same or different from others in your community and nation? How might you encourage them to change their minds?

Prayer

Help me to discern, O God, how the resources to which I am privileged to have access may be better used for the good of my sisters and brothers around me and in all the world. Grant me a more "world-focused" view of my possessions and my life.

Day 28: Add My Voice to the Cry of the Suffering

The horror of events unfolding in Darfur, to which my beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II referred on many occasions, **points to the need for a stronger international resolve to ensure security and basic human rights. Today, I add my voice to the cry of the suffering** and assure you that the Holy See, together with the apostolic nuncio in Khartoum, will continue to do everything possible to end the cycle of violence and misery.

Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Archbishop of Khartoum, Sudan, and Sudanese Pilgrims, Nov. 28, 2005

Reflection

Some harrowing statistics reveal that the conflict in Darfur, which began over three years ago, in February of 2003, continues to impact the lives of millions of victims:

- The number of Sudanese who have died in the conflict is now up to 450,000 people.
- Due to inadequate conditions, the World Food Program was forced to cut its supplies to Darfur in half in July 2006, and the child malnutrition rate has almost reached the highest level since 2004.
- At least 2.5 million people have been displaced by the conflict and are living in refugee camps or without a home at all.

The international community has remained largely immobile in response to the conflict and has been riven by disagreement about everything from whether the mass killings constitute genocide to what type of sanctions and support should be utilized. In February 2006, the United Nations declared that UN Peacekeeping troops could be utilized, but President Bush subsequently declared that no U.S. troops would be sent. What do you think must happen in order for this conflict to be resolved? How can the international community become more active? What is your role?

Prayer

God, grant me compassion for your children in Darfur. Add my voice to the cry of the suffering in Darfur and help me to be a voice of faith calling for international action.

Day 29: What Does Solidarity Look Like?

To make a concrete response to the appeal of our brothers and sisters in humanity, we must come to grips with the first of these challenges: **solidarity among generations, solidarity between countries and entire continents, so that all human beings may share more equitably in the riches of our planet.** This is one of the essential services that people of good will must render to humanity. **The earth, in fact, can produce enough to nourish all its inhabitants, on the condition that the rich countries do not keep for themselves what belongs to all.**

Pope Benedict XVI, Audience to seven new ambassadors to the Holy See, June 16, 2005

Reflection

What does solidarity entail in terms of:

- solidarity among generations?
- solidarity between countries and entire continents?

Pope Benedict XVI says that solidarity will allow human beings to share more equitably the riches of our planet. How is solidarity linked to greater food security for all?

What are ways that you practice solidarity?

Prayer

We dream of a world of solidarity
between generations
between countries and entire continents.

In a world of solidarity
people will be equal
and all will have enough.

We dream of this world.

Let it be.

Day 30: God Does Not Allow Darkness to Prevail

Even in the “valley of darkness” of which the Psalmist speaks (Psalm 23:4), while the tempter prompts us to despair or to place a vain hope in the work of our own hands, God is there to guard us and sustain us. **Yes, even today the Lord hears the cry of the multitudes longing for joy, peace, and love.** As in every age, they feel abandoned. Yet, even in the desolation of misery, loneliness, violence and hunger that indiscriminately afflict children, adults, and the elderly, **God does not allow darkness to prevail.**

Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent, 2006, Jan. 31, 2006

Reflection

“God does not allow darkness to prevail.” Do you believe this?

What situations make you feel hopeless? What do you think will never change? Our faith as Christians gives us hope that darkness cannot be the end: God hears the cries of the suffering and responds, oftentimes through us. Christ calls us to be his beacon of hope and light in the darkness. Reflect on this image for a few minutes - of being a beacon of hope, a flame lit by God. What does this mean for your life?

Prayer

Light up my life

as a flame for you, God.

Blow your Spirit gently on me,

that I may burn brightly for you, God.

Give me the courage

to go where there is despair, God.

Make me a beacon

so that darkness will not prevail.