

[Readings: Numbers.6:22-27; Ps.67; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21]

Pope Francis issued his annual message for today's Feast of the Mother of God, and the World Day of Peace. The message:

"Forgive us our trespasses: grant us your peace."

Pope Francis calls on all nations to eliminate the death penalty, to divert a fixed percentage of arms spending to a global fund to promote the education of the young, to fight hunger and climate change, and to cancel the international debt of developing nations as concrete ways to usher in a new era of hope.

The pope made these three proposals for bringing about "much-needed changes" during the newly-begun Jubilee Year, which focuses on "Pilgrims of Hope." The proposals, he wrote, are "capable of restoring dignity to the lives of entire peoples and enabling them to set out anew on the journey of hope."

The *first proposal*, he wrote, is renewing the appeal launched by St. John Paul II for the Holy Year 2000 to consider "reducing substantially, if not canceling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations."

Foreign debt, Pope Francis wrote, "has become a means of control whereby certain governments and private financial institutions of the richer countries unscrupulously and indiscriminately exploit the human and natural resources of poorer countries, simply to satisfy the demands of their own markets."

Pope Francis also said wealthier nations must recognize their own "ecological debt" to the global south due to the exploitation of resources, the destruction of ecosystems and the effects of climate

change. "The more prosperous countries ought to feel called to do everything possible to forgive the debts of those countries that are in no condition to repay the amount they owe."

The pope's *second proposal* is for "a firm commitment" to respecting "the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, so that each person can cherish his or her own life and all may look with hope to a future of prosperity and happiness for themselves and for their children."

"Without hope for the future, it becomes hard for the young to look forward to bringing new lives into the world," he wrote. And a "concrete gesture that can help foster the culture of life" is the elimination of the death penalty in all nations. The death penalty "not only compromises the inviolability of life but eliminates every human hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation."

The pope's *third appeal* follows "in the footsteps of St. Paul VI and Benedict XVI. In this time marked by wars, let us use at least a fixed percentage of the money earmarked for armaments to establish a global fund. The fund should finance initiatives "to eradicate hunger" and facilitate educational activities in poor countries to promote sustainable development and combat climate change.

Pope Francis said in his message that the jubilee tradition is meant to remind all people, "rich and poor alike, that no one comes into this world doomed to oppression: all of us are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father, born to live in freedom, in accordance with the Lord's will."

Christians "feel bound to cry out and denounce the many situations in which the earth is exploited and our neighbors oppressed," he wrote.

Calling for and implementing concrete solutions to systemic injustice is part of the Christian desire to "break the bonds of injustice and to proclaim God's justice."

"Forgive us our trespasses: grant us your peace."

Will YOU become "Pilgrims of Hope?" May this Jubilee Year be one of mercy and forgiveness and peace for all of us.

Holy Mary, Mother of God and Queen of Peace, pray for us!