

## Lent is time to help others spiritually, materially, pope says



VATICAN CITY — In his Lenten message, Pope Benedict XVI called on the faithful to be concerned for one another and "not to remain isolated and indifferent" to the fate of others.

Materialism and a sense of self-sufficiency are obstacles to a Christian life of charity, the pope said.

Instead of looking first to God and then to the well-being of others, people often have an attitude of "indifference and disinterest born of selfishness and masked as a respect for 'privacy.'"

He said that God's commandment to love "demands that we acknowledge our responsibility toward those who, like ourselves, are creatures and children of God."

The annual Lenten message was presented during a Vatican news conference Feb. 7 by Cardinal Robert Sarah, president of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, the office which handles the pope's charitable giving, along with Msgr. Segundo Tejado Munoz, the council's undersecretary.

The cardinal highlighted the pope's call for "fraternal correction" and the church's prophetic mission in denouncing situations of injustice and poverty in the world.

To overcome such injustices, one must get to the moral roots of such situations, he said. Corruption, accumulation of wealth, violence, and living off the work of others without contributing are all cancers that weaken a society from within, the cardinal said.

But, he said, the true root of the world's injustices stems from ignoring or denying God's existence. By not acknowledging there is a creator and Lord who is greater than man, society degenerates into a "conflictual individualism" and a struggle of one person against another, Cardinal Sarah said.

The theme of the 2012 Lenten message was taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews: "Let us be concerned for each other, to stir a response in love and good works."

The pope outlined his message with three points taken from St. Paul's letter: "concern for others, reciprocity and personal holiness."

Concern for others, the pope said, means wanting what is good physically, morally and spiritually for one's neighbor. But he noted that contemporary culture "seems to have lost the sense of good and evil."

"There is a real need to reaffirm that good does exist and will prevail," the pope said, defining good as "whatever gives, protects and promotes life, brotherhood and communion."

The pope warned against what he called "spiritual anesthesia," which numbs people to the suffering of others. Only a "humbleness of heart and the personal experience of suffering can awaken within us a sense of compassion and empathy," he said.

The suffering of others is not only physical or material, he said, but it is also spiritual, and he encouraged Christians to remember their "spiritual responsibility" toward their neighbor. He called for a renewal of a forgotten aspect of the Christian life, that is, "fraternal correction."

Fraternal correction, he said, is a kind of Christian charity that speaks out against people indulging in sin.

"We must not remain silent before evil," he said.

Often, "out of human regard or purely personal convenience," Christians fail to warn others against ways of thinking and behaving that are contrary to the truth.

The reluctance to confront others in the name of truth, he said, stems from a world view dominated by individualism, which "accepts any moral choice in the name of personal freedom," which then makes people blind to physical suffering and the spiritual and moral demands of life.

However, God wants Christians to help and encourage each other to strive for the truth, for good and holy lives, he said.

Fraternal correction must never be motivated by a spirit of accusation or recrimination, but instead be both loving and admonishing, as God is with his children, he added.

"Both our sins and our acts of love have a social dimension," which is why the church asks forgiveness for the sins of its members and at the same time rejoices in examples of virtue and charity in the church, he said.

The pope said time is precious and people must not become lukewarm about performing good works and using their God-given spiritual and material riches for the benefit of others.

In a world "which demands of Christians a renewed witness of love and fidelity to the Lord, may all of us feel the urgent need to anticipate one another in charity, service and good works," he said.

