

MEETING WITH THE CHILDREN OF ROME

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XV

30 July 1916

It is only right and natural that at Our invitation addressed to all the children of Europe on this day, the anniversary of a mournful event, with so many of us fervently approaching together the sacred Eucharistic Meal, that we correspond first with the Children of our Rome.

Closest to the heart of the Vicar of Christ, they come from nearby and sense very well what is needed, they are aware of the aspirations, and the sorrows; native-born citizens of Rome, they feel at their tender age the pulsing of the heart of the world that is the Holy See; descended from fortunate parents who are of our Faith, they carry in their veins the blood of Tarcisius, that brings their heart toward the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar in which lives every reason of their faith and traditions.

We're grateful to you, signor Cardinal, to have given Us this day the satisfaction to be able to contemplate this select and large group of children, from every Altar of the Meal of the Invisible God that have come now to Us, the visible continuation of the authority and the Person of Christ: We see the spirit of candor and love, which brings us the warmth of the Divine Love in their simple hearts, and we hear unlocked in their greeting to Us from their uncontaminated lips, resounding still now that Supreme Prayer, that of the Universal Communion we wish to join.

Many times we have sadly asked if perhaps it is not a deformed version of the spirit of Christian mortification which is suggested in the condition of these times, far from the battle fields, but not far from the horrors of war, lives the human society, too. And unfortunately we must respond with sadness, which a second time, seconds the words of the Scriptures: Every land is desolate – it appears painted on the faces along with the recollections of the penance from many tragedies, since adults do not want to leave the attractions of the worldly life.

The well-being of the human race is shaken, but don't despair, however, of the companionship of Him who feels the emotions of the people – we look for refuge in our thoughts as we hope that the compassion and goodness of the Divine Father will make Him consider the penance of the adults, and the innocence of the young children.

Therefore, We call to you Children, to gather all the love of your parents with which to form your future, and to gather especially the love of the Father of the Faithful, and make sweet the bitterness, which constitutes Hope.

Looking at you, beloved Children, we see all the children that today in every part of the world receive the Eucharistic Food. We see in thousands of faces the same image of God, reflected in the pure mirror of your candid souls, and marked by that with such an omnipotence, that comes from your supplicating lips.

Omnipotence, in the first place, is the daughter of your innocence, because in the presence of God, the prayer of a heart which has always been pure has greater effect than those of a heart made pure through penance.

Omnipotence, in the second place, is the companion of your weakness, since The Author of All has chosen to confound the powerful of the world, by “the weak ones of the world.”

If this serves to render your innocence and your frivolity powerful, how much more effective does it render your completely unique predilection which brings you to Jesus?

And who ever hugs Jesus Christ, if not a child? And who, if not they, could choose a life that would not impede one from getting close to him? And who is it we are to resemble in order to enter into Heaven? Who proclaims never to have despised, and who says without any great inhibition in its way, to stay with the Heart and do not offend your soul? In other words – this is some of the reason why Jesus gave the destiny and the authority of the children to be much the same as a Crown Prince who is destined to be the Heir, not of the reign of the world but of the Crown of the Reign of Heaven: “in their grasp is the reign of Heaven”. They have in the heavens, in which they reign, assistants to interpret their prayers close to the Throne of God, like on earth there are assistants who take the requests of Kings to other Kings. These assistants, in other words, their Angels, do not need to be introduced to the Lord, because they always are before the Face of the Father.

And it is to such omnipotence We are entrusted, O Children, so that on the anniversary of mournful memories, We have given you the invitation to come forward to the Celestial Meal.

This great motive which inspires Our invitation, your parish priests and your instructors, under the wise guidance of our Cardinal Vicar, is meant to give you a sign in proportion to your intelligence.

So that for your entire life you will have carved into your soul the memory of this moment, and always have the memory of what you have heard from the mouth of the Vicar of Christ, know also from Us, O Children, that for two long years, men who were like you, innocent and lovable, are no longer innocent and lovable – they are torn to pieces and massacred. Your heart, mild by nature and docile like the one of Christ, your fantasy and imagination are sheltered from such horrid scenes, and cannot comprehend the size of the tragedies that man causes man.

Perhaps, some among you have heard someone recount having lived through the conflict, your father, a brother, a stranger who you heard speaking through the walls, who left for the war, and then became – which God did not want! – wounded, a prisoner, lost. But there is more which escapes you, fortunately, the comprehension of the tremendous spectacle; it is enough for your intellect to be able today to understand the idea, when you are older you will understand more of the meaning of the story, you are being today an unconscious spectator of the gloomiest tragedy of human hatred and human insanity; and to verify to you in this most terrifying episode, that God, in mysterious and infinite council, can never use his arm to remain on a sinful society.

We, on the contrary, Father of all the Faithful, We in our Heart, have the repercussion and concentration of the sorrows and the cries of all of Our children, We by now have suffered almost two years, exhorting and praying.

If up until now we did not succeed with Our exhortation to dispose the army, We invite you to try and search for Reason and for Justice, in order to end this dishonorable slaughter. And like one hanging onto a board in a shipwreck, we have resolved to have recourse again to the invocation of The Divine Omnipotence of your innocence.

Perhaps – we thought – tired, if not placated, by the hard retributions of the constant memory of His children, perhaps God will be affected by the cry of the innocent, which is the cry of Justice, like the Justice that was the cry of His Son, the Redeemer of the world.

Perhaps - we said - the prodigy of the Son of Agar will be renewed at the foot of the Altar, sentenced to die in solitude, condemned and exiled with his mother. Agar lost all hope, and resigned to perish, "God heard the voice of the boy, from the place wherein he is," (Gen. XXI: 17) and then an Angel called Agar from Heaven, and said to her: "Don't worry", God hears the invocation of the children, "God hears the voices of the children, from the place wherein they are", from the altar, entrusted to their innocence the message of hope and of well-being.

Stretch out your hand, O beloved and omnipotent children, to the Vicar of Christ, and give the consolation of the incomparable victory of your precious prayers.

Do your parents, your brothers and sisters, and all the adults of your family respond to your humble demands?

Yes, they do what you ask; because it is irresistible, and for God, the way that you speak to him and ask, is also irresistible, and will be your example, to your loved ones, of who you all are.

You know what it is We want. We want that the human society stop the hate and the massacres, and, after being of the wickedness of Cain, to convert, to be like Abel in the activities of peace, good works and forgiveness.

In what way will we do this? In a way in which We do not formulate projects, because for the theme we will have Our children, all equally loved by Us, a proposal of unequalled power to succeed.

We today count on reaffirming our solemn commitment, and by it we receive the fulfillment from the Omnipotent of that which He is, God of Justice, God of Mercy and of Pardon. He will arrange from Above the plans of humanity, and the economy of providence, wise and indulgent of the human generations, will be more conducive to the ultimate good.

While you are today, O Children, in this Rome, of the entire world, many are in places of sadness, too vast and too painful, where Iron and Fire reign, be before God Our Messengers of Peace. An Only Son, by the Splendor of His Grace, moved the Heart of God: One Child Alone placed in the arms of the navigator of the warship Albuquerque near the Cape of Good Hope, could alter the direction away from the storm and save the ship: a thousand children, millions of children, are they not moving the Heart of Jesus Today?

Be, yes, be, O Delightful Ones, imitators of the children of the Hebrews, go to meet with the Triumphant Lord. Bringing the Olive Branch they, with childlike decorum, will offer to the King of Peace glory, laude and honor, prayerful Hosannas to the Son of David. Also, you will lift the Olive branch, the symbol of a forgotten path, to be fore-runners, Standard-Bearers, imploring, by speaking with the Author of Peace.

And as the God of the sons of the Hebrews saved them from death by the sign of the red blood on the doors of their houses, to you, to your family, to the entire world save above all the flowing of more blood, a substance which is infinitely precious, that bathed the Cross of the Divine Son, and which today, after the Mystical Banquet, reddens your lips, symbol at once of the Redemption and of the Pardon, which is able to be given only by Jesus.

The Benediction of God hastens the realization of this solemn commitment, which comes more from the heart than from the lips.