



Charitate Christi

Encyclical Of Pope Leo XII

Extending Junilee To The Entire Church

December 25, 1825

To the Whole Catholic Flock.

Venerable Brothers, Greetings and Apostolic Benediction.

The love of Christ urges Us to make the fruits of His passion available to all, in so far as We are able. During the universal jubilee, both the inhabitants of this city and the many pilgrims who have come here have shown faith, piety and every other virtue. We therefore conceived the great hope that the same zeal for the profit of their souls, for the glory of God, and for His Church might be kindled in the faithful everywhere. We also wish to grant your request, venerable brothers, and that of the Catholic princes, who have at heart the real happiness of the people subject to them. We have thus thought of opening the treasures of the Church to all the regions of the world, as was done in Rome this past year of the jubilee, and as Benedict XIV and Pius VI did.

Therefore We have published a Constitution addressed to all the Christian faithful by which We extend the jubilee and its indulgences; it also designates which good works, and within what space of time, they must be performed to obtain the indulgence, though We are leaving to your discretion the authority to change the enjoined works for the convenience of those who are legitimately impeded. So that all may learn of Our decree, We send you this letter. You know how necessary your labor is and how much effort you must expend so that the happy outcome may correspond to Our intentions. Indeed, the people will receive as much profit from this jubilee year as they will have employed diligence and zeal to prepare themselves for it. That they prepare diligently depends on the care which you exercise in your pastoral office. Let your people know therefore the nature and value of what is offered them. Show them the price of the treasures which We open for them, and how easily all may share in the riches unlocked, both because of the sweeping authority over the remission of sins that We grant to confessors, and also because of the nature of the works themselves which are imposed for the expiation of sins.

You know the severity of Church discipline in this matter prior to the fourteenth century. "Whoever for the sake only of devotion," says Urban II in the Council of Claremont, "not for honor or money, set out for the liberation of the Church of God in Jerusalem, that journey was counted a complete penance." Certainly no other plenary indulgence was customarily given at the time, as we know from the blessed cardinal Joseph Mary Thomas. He says: "This plenary indulgence, in which the work enjoined was most arduous because of the expense, the discomfort, the labor of the journey, and the imminent danger to life, so that it appeared to be rather a change of penance than a relaxation ... this plenary indulgence, I say, other pontiffs later always confirmed for the Holy Land."

Let the faithful consider how the Church pities the weakness of her children and now imposes labors so much lighter and easier for invaluable goods. Surely no one is so weak and negligent as not to desire those goods at so small a price. But we must diligently take care lest "on this account," to use the words of the Council of Trent, "they look upon the sins themselves as less serious, less offensive and insulting to the Holy Spirit, and so fall into more grievous sins, laying up for themselves treasures of wrath for the day of wrath." Thus let the liberality of the Church be shown, but let nothing at all be relaxed with regard to the diligence and industry by which men recall their sins, grieve over them, detest them, and confess them sincerely and fully. They may thus be led to wonder at and love the liberality of a God who offers himself so easily to those whose impiety is never sufficiently punished, "who once were delivered from the servitude of sin and the devil by baptism and received the gift of the Holy Spirit, yet have not feared to violate knowingly the temple of God and to sadden the Holy Spirit."

2. For this reason, following the example of our predecessors, we have published a solemn jubilee and commanded that God's assistance be publicly requested, for without such help human weakness cannot accomplish anything of this kind. We also order the Eucharistic Sacrament for the people both in the churches and on the roads, where with the aid of zealous ministers the Catholic doctrine concerning indulgences and jubilees should be diligently taught. Finally, the people should be admonished about every duty of the Christian way of life and with serious sermons be summoned to sincere repentance.

3. May each one of you consider as addressed to himself those words of the prophet: "Cry out and cease not: like a trumpet raise your voice and tell my people their crimes, and the house of Jacob their sins." You yourselves and your duly chosen preachers should impress on the ears of all what Christ threatened: "Unless you shall have done penance, you shall all likewise perish." Let them teach that for us to repent we must ask with humble prayer what the prophet implored: "Convert us to you, Lord, and we shall be converted." Show what a great offense against God sin is. Implant in the minds of the people a salutary fear; dwell on the severity of the impending divine judgment and the agony of the punishments prepared for those who die in sin. But rouse hope in all of obtaining mercy from the infinite goodness of God, who affirms that He hopes to be merciful, for His are these sweet

words: "Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities, and iniquity will not be ruin for you. Cast off your prevarications and make for yourselves a new spirit.... Because I do not desire the death of the dying," says the Lord God, "turn back and live." From this we easily see how worthy of love a Father so good and merciful is. From this let us consider how unworthy of such great goodness is the intent of offending Him. Then let inner grief spring up, along with detestation of sins and the certain and deliberate resolve to correct life and morals.

4. After showing the necessity of inner penance and preparing the souls of the faithful for its acquisition, teach them penance as a sacrament. Let the ministers admonish them that it is as necessary for those who have fallen after baptism as baptism is for those who have not yet received it, and therefore it is appropriately called "a plank after shipwreck" with which alone it is possible to reach the port of eternal salvation. Let them show with what sentiments of grief and humility, with what faith, with what integrity they ought to confess their sins. Let them mention that a general confession is often useful, and in certain cases entirely necessary. Even when sins have been washed away by absolution and eternal punishment relaxed, temporal punishment often remains. Thus divine justice strictly demands that men at least receive punishments of definite duration when eternal punishment would still be inadequate. Thus instructed, the faithful will be able to acquire the fruits of the holy jubilee.

For their sakes you must make sure that they understand and believe that Christ left the inexhaustible treasury of his merits to the Church, that this treasury was enriched with the merits of the Blessed Virgin and all the saints, and that the distribution of these riches to men is in the hands of Him whom Christ make the visible head for Himself of the invisible Church. Accordingly it is left to the Pope to apply these merits now more amply, now less amply, to the living in the form of absolution, to the departed after the manner of suffrage. In the former case, He may apply the merits if they have purged their sins in the sacrament of penance and have been absolved of the eternal punishment, and in the latter if they have departed this life joined to God by love. The indulgence obviates the temporal punishments owed to God for our sins to a greater or less degree, according to the manner of application set up by the Pope and the preparation of the faithful. Finally the indulgence of the jubilee is plenary and distinct from other similar indulgences, because in the jubilee year of solemn remission ministers are given more authority to absolve from sins and to relax bonds and impediments. While the prayers of the entire Christian people rise in chorus, the Lord is placated by penitence and His mercy descends more certainly on all.

5. And these indeed are what the people are to be taught, but the apt and timely work of the priest to whom they confess their sins is necessary for them to act on what they have learned. For this reason you must take diligent care that those who hear confessions exemplify what our predecessor Innocent III prescribes for the minister of penance, namely that he be discreet and cautious. According to the manner of the wise physician, he should pour wine and oil on the wounds of the

injured and diligently inquire into the circumstances of the sinner and of the sin, so as to learn what kind of advice he ought to give and what kind of remedy must be applied. Let him keep before his eyes the documents of the Roman ritual and weigh diligently when and to whom absolution is to be given or denied or deferred, lest he absolve those who are incapable of receiving such a blessing (that is those who show no signs of grief, those who do not wish to give up hatreds and enmities, to make restitution when they can, to avoid the proximate occasions of sin, or to use other means of amending their lives, and those who have given public scandal and refuse to repent through public satisfaction). Anyone can see how far removed these things are from those priests who, hearing some serious crime or finding someone infected with many kinds of sin, at once say that they are not able to give absolution. To be sure, they refuse to attend those very ones whose needs they have been established to watch over, for Christ said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." This is also far removed from those priests in whom any little diligent examining of conscience or sign of grief and intention seems sufficient that they think they are able to absolve. And finally, they think they have taken a safe plan if they dismiss the people to another time for absolution. Indeed, they think that they have given safe counsel by sending the people away to be absolved at another time. It is necessary to observe the mean in this matter because excessive ease in granting absolution may encourage facility in sinning, and excessive rigor may alienate souls from confession and tempt them to despair over salvation.

Indeed many imagine themselves entirely unprepared, but can usually ready themselves by understanding how to deal zealously, patiently, and gently with their people. For priests are clothed in the mercy of Jesus Christ, who did not come to call the just but to call sinners. Indeed, those who have been guilty of grievous crimes or have been away from the confessional for many years are not for this reason only unworthy of confession, for the mercy of the Lord is not limited but is rather an infinite treasure. Those who are uneducated or retarded and so have not examined themselves sufficiently -- they will need assistance from their priest for this -- are likewise eligible for confession. Unworthy however are those for whom the priest has done what is necessary, not burdening them beyond measure in questioning but diligently endeavoring to elicit detestation of sin, not failing to pray to God for them but exhausting the diligence of love. He may then judge them to lack the spirit of grief and penitence by which they may attain the grace of the sacrament. But whatever the penitents' disposition of soul, the confessor must never dismiss anyone with mistrust of God's goodness or hostility to the sacrament of reconciliation. If for a just reason absolution must be postponed, it is necessary to persuade the penitents with kindness that the duty and obligation of the confessor's office and their heavenly salvation demand this. The priest should encourage them most tenderly to return as soon as possible; having done faithfully the things which were prescribed for their salvation, they may break the bonds of sin and be refreshed by the sweetness of heavenly grace. An apt model of this charity is St. Raymond of Penafort, whom the Church calls a renowned minister of the sacrament of penance. He writes: Knowing the sins of his people, let the

confessor be benevolent and prepared to raise up and carry the burden himself. Let him show affection, compassion, and discretion. The confessor should aid the penitent with prayer, giving of alms, and other good works; he should assist with mildness, consolation, and a promise of hope and, when the occasion demands, also with rebuke.

6. If you receive them with patient love like this, sinners will also accept their penances with greater equanimity. The sinners must understand that a jubilee indulgence does not remit the penance enjoined by the priest. The integrity of the sacrament demands penance, even when an indulgence has been granted. Remind the ministers of penance of those words of the Council of Trent: priests ought to enjoin salutary satisfaction appropriate to the nature of the crime and the ability of the penitent. Remind them also of what the catechism of the same holy council teaches concerning the penalty, that nothing should be assigned by whimsy, but everything should be directed through justice, prudence, and piety. In this way sins may be measured as by a ruler so the penitents may recognize the gravity of their crimes. It will also be worthwhile to explain to them at times what penalties had been set for certain crimes according to the penitential prescription of the ancient canons; you should also explain that the nature of satisfaction is to be adjusted to the intention of sin.

7. Particularly at this time of mercy and remission, the priests should remember what the angelic Doctor says: "It is better that the priest explains to the penitent how great a penance he deserves and then enjoins something quite tolerable." Chrysostom likewise had taught: "If in no way you desire to spare the penitent, use a fitting procedure. It will often happen that, despondent even to the point of rejecting everything, both the medicine and the chains, he may cast himself headlong, the yoke broken, the snare loosed. For my part I am able to list many great sinners who were only saved because a worthy penance, one on a par with the crime, was exacted."

8. The authority to dispense the merits of Christ the Lord and his saints after penance has been attended to allows the faithful to complete whatever punishments are still owed for their sins. See to it that they understand why, in what order, and with what piety the works enjoined for this purpose are to be executed. They should learn that the supplications which are prescribed for certain sacred places are like those stations where in the very early days the faithful customarily assembled on fixed days for fasting, prayer, and self-examination.

9. But if the Church today asks so much less for a plenary indulgence, this certainly does not mean that she now thinks that we owe God less compensation for our sins. Rather, as she takes away from the difficulty of external expiation, so she desires that by more intense contrition and zeal, an interior advance of souls may proceed.

10. Among the works enjoined, the reception of the holy eucharist is listed. Since in

it Christ the Lord, the font of all celestial grace and gifts, is contained, surely there is no more efficacious means to enkindle perfect love. Therefore you must expend great care that the faithful are taught the efficacy and nature of so great a sacrament and approach it with affection and spiritual preparation.

11. Thus, We especially desire that the faithful be admonished about these things. Relying on your zeal for the salvation of the souls committed to you, We have confidence that through Our instructions all will obtain the plenary indulgence which We offer from the inestimable treasure of the Church. We are likewise confident that the faithful will gain this indulgence so that its fruits remain in the future. As We extend such a benefit to all the Catholics of the world, We wish that every corruption of morals among the Christian people be removed forever, if possible. You know well that vices are especially dominant in your flocks. Your pastoral zeal should never waver as you strive to eradicate sin and vice. That monstrous crime of blasphemy, for instance -- who would ever have believed that it could be heard among Christians? And yet there is almost no region now where oaths are not taken rashly, and the holy and terrible name of God is used irreverently in every land. Some even dare to blaspheme Him whom the angels glorify. With fiery zeal, search out and attack this impiety which so greatly injures God.

12. You especially should love the beauty of the house of the Lord, and you must take care lest any inappropriate appearance and dress or any irreligious conduct violate it. Do not let the faithful ever forget these words of the Lord: "My house is a house of prayer" and "The zeal for your house consumes me."

13. Admonished by you, may the people remember the precept which the Lord himself announced: remember to keep holy the sabbath. Let them also remember the frightful judgment pronounced against the violators: My sabbaths they have greatly violated. I said therefore I will pour out my wrath over them and consume them. In this however, the perversity of many is so great that either they do not hesitate to do servile work, or they themselves abuse the exemption from such work prescribed to worship God in order to worship the devil. So on feastdays they give themselves up to banquets, to insobriety, to wantonness, and to all the works of the devil. Abolish this wickedness forever, as best you are able, and replace it with zeal for prayer and for hearing the word of God. Replace it with assistance at mass and with the Eucharist itself, a salutary participation in Christ's sacrifice.

14. But what shall We say about the precepts of the Church, what in particular about abstinence, about keeping the fasts? How many are there who do not care about this precept as they should, or even despise it entirely? In this matter too you understand how necessary it is that the faithful understand to what extent the precepts pertain to the Church and with how much veneration they are to obey the authority of so great a parent, of whom the bridegroom himself, Jesus Christ said: Whoever does not hear the Church, let him be to you like a gentile and publican.

15. You must care for the faithful of all ages, but especially for those on which the future state of the Church and human society depends. Indeed impiety, sworn to achieve the destruction of both, attempts with all her might to bring the young under her banner. Either negligence or perversity in the education and discipline of the young must account for that disregard for the sanctity and duties of matrimony which now seems to have overtaken men. Often a civil contract, as they call it, is used in many regions, so that the holy laws of that sacrament so esteemed by Paul the Apostle and writer are violated. The iniquitous convention between Catholics and heretics has grown to such an extent that either all the children follow the religion of the father, or the boys that of the father and the girls that of the mother. You see therefore how solicitous you must be that the faithful adhere to Catholic doctrine about that sacrament and obey the laws of the Church. Strive to cleanse the faithful from the evil destruction that has overtaken Christian education. Strive with all your ability to saturate youth with Catholic customs and rules of life, demanding this of them, of their parents, and of their teachers. Especially however, see that they are on their guard against seduction, so that they may shudder at the evil opinions propagated by these miserable times and at the books inimical to religion, morals, and public peace, from which this foul crop of wickedness has grown. May it be kept as a pest, far from the faithful people. Remind them again and again how popes and princes of the past attacked such books; in this matter do not consider your care and vigilance too great. If the faithful are nourished with the word of God, if the frequent reception of the sacraments is stressed, if pious societies are promoted wherever they are, or established where they do not yet exist-if these things are done, the needs of every age, sex, and human condition will be met.

16. But to do these things you will need helpers, whom the Lord has called as laborers into his vineyard. Admonish them diligently not to be idle and to labor to keep the morals of the people within bounds. Seriously investigate their lives, their conversations, their lifestyles, and their habits, for "a dirty hand (as Gregory the martyr says) does not wash another, and an eye full of dust does not see the blemish; so one who desires to correct others must himself be clean." Attend diligently to gravity and modesty in their external appearance. In order that they may be suited to teach the faithful and perform the ecclesiastical ministries correctly, do not be content with the proof they may have given before ordination; take care that the initiated may never cease to exercise themselves actively in sacred studies. The Roman council held under Benedict XIII in the jubilee year 1725 decreed that meetings of clerics should be held once each week, in which cases of ceremony and conscience are discussed and resolved. We wish to commend this to you even more earnestly.

17. It is proper for the other ecclesiastics to excel in all things as they excel in dignity. For this reason you must observe them diligently so that the people may notice nothing reprehensible in those they look up to. Let them cooperate with you by counsel and labor in the work of the ministry, in the building up of the body of Christ, that they may be deservedly called a senate of the Church according to the

Council of Trent. Sharpen especially the care and industry of parish priests, that, according to the prescriptions of the same holy synod, they may constantly and in person instruct the people. They should refresh them with the sacraments and pour out petitions and prayers daily to God. Finally by a laudable example of life and conduct and by their virtues and character, they should illumine all and point out before them the way of salvation as they perform the other prescribed offices.

18. Guard the seminary as the pupil of the eye, and may the education of clerics, who grow up as the hope of the Church, be your first care. Watch sharply lest anyone who does not give evidence by talent, virtue, and knowledge that he is truly called to the lot of the Lord is ordained. With no less care look into the practices of religious communities, using the authority which is given you by the sacred Council of Trent, either as ordinaries or as delegates of the Apostolic See. Inspect the schools and colleges frequently, to keep out the poison of the present corrupt age and to direct all things according to the norms of sacred discipline. Insist that nuns who have taken religious vows excel in their duties. See that the girls (as the Roman council admonishes) they have taken as boarders are piously instructed by them in the Catholic tradition, and see to it that their dress may not be inappropriate for girls living amidst the spouses of Christ. Take seriously the holding of synods and the visitation of the diocese as ordained by the Council of Trent. We exhort you repeatedly to discharge your obligations at the times prescribed by that council and in a religious manner. In so doing you will learn to know your sheep, understanding for which of their ills a remedy is required and what opportunities are considered suitable.

The care of all classes is committed to you, but especially that of the poor, for whom Christ confessed that he was sent by the Father and in whose favor he gave such renowned and singular arguments of good will. However you understand how easy it is for the destitute to lose every benefit of God's presence. Therefore use the resources of the Church to fulfill the precepts of the Lord in an exemplary manner, what is left over, give in alms, and always do faithfully what the Church prescribes for bishops in the use of these goods. May the groans of the needy have easy access to you. Seek the aid of the wealthy for them in almsgiving, and defend them from all oppression and harm to the best of your ability. Move zealously against the injustice of money lenders, who, as the Roman catechism says, plunder the people and kill them with usury, for this evil has grown strong in present times. A defense against that evil theft was devised by pious men in the bank of commodities and of money lending, approved by popes and spread all over the world. We grieve that in many places they have been closed by the rapacity of those who had boasted to be liberators of the popular happiness. Strive to restore them, and inform the faithful of the indulgences which our predecessors granted to those who contribute to promote so pious a work.

19. Among the poor We commend especially to your loving care those for whom either orphanhood or illness is a burden added to their poverty. Diligently prepare homes to care for and educate young people of both sexes and to receive the sick

and infirm, both for the needs of health and family and for the needs of the soul.

20. But enough. You are pastors and teachers of the people. For this reason, venerable brothers, it is not enough for you to watch lest the flocks entrusted to you suffer attacks from spiritual beasts. You must also nourish them with the warnings and salutary laws of heavenly doctrine, and especially with good example. In this regard the words of our Lord apply also to you when he said: "You are the light of the world . . . so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, who is in heaven." This alone is sufficient to influence souls and to stop those who speak ill, according to these words of the Apostle: "In all things show yourself an example of good works, in doctrine, in integrity, in gravity, with sound and irreprehensible speech, so that he who is opposed, fears, having nothing evil to say of you." Then it will come about not only that the people see what must be done, but that they themselves act, and so, like the Apostles, you too may be the salt of the earth. This means that when the odor of sin has been taken away and men have been instructed by you, the integrity of life and morality will be preserved for a long time. These are our desires, and We trust that, relying on your virtuous zeal and God's assistance, We shall obtain them. With error and vice banished and with piety strengthened, the chosen faithful may thus put on, as the Apostle exhorts, mercy, benignity, humility, and modesty; supporting one another patiently, they may give to each other, even as the Lord has given to us. Above all, however, may they have love, the bond of perfection, which brings with it all the Christian virtues joined together. It preserves them and joins man with God -- and the whole perfection of man consists in this. May you obtain this fruit of the sacred jubilee through the merits of Jesus Christ and all the saints. May the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation grant us Our desires through the same Son of God, our Redeemer, who had the same prayer: I ask you Father, that all may be one, as we are one. Begging this with all Our energy of soul, We most lovingly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, and to the flocks committed to your care. Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, December 25, 1825, in the third year of our pontificate.