



Praedecessores Nostros

On Aid For Ireland

Encyclical Of Pope Pius IX

March 25, 1847

To all Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops and Bishops.

Venerable Brothers, We give you Greetings and Our Apostolic Blessing.

You know from your study of the Church's history, that Our predecessors in the Roman Pontificate assiduously assisted Christian nations. You know too that this zeal included not only spiritual benefits conferred on the Christian people, but also disaster relief whenever calamity struck. This fact is confirmed by documents of ancient^[1] and more recent times, as well as by Our own recollection of recent events. Who indeed could, or should, more fittingly display this fatherly concern of spirit than those whom the Catholic faith teaches "are the Fathers and Teachers of all Christians"?^[2] And to whom should afflicted peoples have recourse but to those who have proved by actual deeds over a long period of time that they are sympathetic benefactors?

2. Inspired by this notable example of Our predecessors, and at the behest of Our own will, We immediately made every effort, as far as in Us lay, to bring help to the Irish nation in their time of peril. Therefore as soon as We learned that the kingdom of Ireland was suffering a great dearth of food, both grain and other provisions, and that the nation was hard pressed by a series of awful diseases caused by this lack of food, We immediately came to their aid. We proclaimed that public prayers should be made by God in this city of Ours; We exhorted the Roman clergy and people, as well as the rest of Rome's residents, to come to the aid of Ireland and to pray for them. By contributing Ourselves and by collecting money in Rome, We were able to send a contribution to Our venerable brothers, the Archbishops of Ireland. They distributed it among the needy.

3. But letters reach Us daily from Ireland, bringing news of the calamity worsening. We are distressed and again want to help that nation. Ireland deserves our aid for so many reasons. The clergy and people of Ireland have always revered the Apostolic See. Indeed that nation has persevered in professing the Catholic religion

in all distressful times, and the Irish clergy has worked industriously to spread the Catholic religion in the farthest parts of the globe. Finally the Irish nation zealously honors and understands divine Peter whose humble representative We are, and whose dignity, to quote the words of Leo the Great, "does not fail in the person of an unworthy heir."^[3]

4. So, after carefully weighing this serious matter and ascertaining also the view of several cardinals on the implementation of Our plan, We have decided to write this letter to you, venerable brothers, so that we may provide for the needs of the Irish people.

5. In this matter We advise you all in the dioceses and districts subject to your jurisdiction to proclaim three days of public prayers in churches and other holy places, as has previously been done in Rome. Do this in order to beseech God, the Father of mercies, to set the Irish people free from this great disaster, and to prevent such a misfortune befalling the other kingdoms and lands of Europe as well. To encourage these prayers, We grant an indulgence of seven years to those who are present at these prayers on any occasion; and, in addition, on those who attend the prayers for the entire three days and who also within a week receive the sacraments of penance and of the most holy Eucharist, We bestow by Our Apostolic authority a plenary indulgence.

6. In addition, We urge you to exhort the people under your jurisdiction to give alms for the relief of the Irish nation. You know the power of almsgiving and the rich fruits which proceed from it. You know the noteworthy praises showered on almsgiving by the holy Church Fathers and especially by St. Leo the Great in many of his sermons.^[4] And you readily recall the well-known letter of St. Cyprian, martyr and Bishop of Carthage, to the Bishops of Numidia,^[5] which contains clear evidence of his people's zeal in generous almsgiving for those Christians who needed help. You can, furthermore, remember the words of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan,^[6] that "the beauty of wealth lies not in the manner of life of the rich but in food given to the poor; wealth is more resplendent among those who are weak and in want; Christians should learn to use money in looking not for their own goods but for Christ's, so that Christ in turn may look after them." When you recall these and other praise, We hope that you will vigorously assist the poor whom We are discussing.

7. We could indeed end Our letter here. But since you are about to proclaim public prayers, We must add, venerable brothers, what "Our daily urgency, the care of all the Churches"^[7] warns Us of, day and night: that is, the furious, savage storm that We have seen for a long time raised up against the whole Church. Our spirit shrinks to recall "how greatly His enemy hates the holy one"^[8] and what evil scheming now goes on "against the Lord and His Christ."^[9] Therefore We strongly recommend that when you proclaim public prayers for Ireland, you ask your people to beseech God at the same time for the whole Church.

Meanwhile, venerable brothers, We most lovingly impart to you Our Apostolic Blessing.

Given in Rome at St. Mary Major's on the 25th of March, 1847, in the first year of Our Pontificate.

1. Euseb., Eccles. Hist., vol. 4, p. 23 (Cambridge edition) for the letter of Dionysius, bishop of the Corinthians, to Pope Soter at Rome where he says that from the very start of the religion, the Roman Church used to send to Christians the help necessary for living, and that this custom was expanded by the blessed Bishop Soter. Likewise Euseb., Eccles Hist., vol. 7, p. 5, recalls the letter of Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria to Pope Stephen I, who had sent necessary aid to the province of Syria and Arabia. There is also a letter of St. Basil to Pope Damasus which speaks of aid sent by Pope St. Dionysius, to the church at Caesarea.
2. Council of Florence on the definition of the Faith.
3. Serm. 2 on the anniversary of his elevation.
4. On the fast of the tenth month and on almsgiving.
5. Epistle 60 (Balut. edit.) in dealing with the money collected at Carthage and sent to the bishops of Numidia for the purpose of redeeming Christians, states that "we have sent a hundred thousand sesterces, which were collected here in the church of which by God's kindness we are the leader, by contribution from the clergy and people who stand firm with us. In your diligence you will distribute this money in your district."
6. Epistle 2 to Bishop Constantius (vol. 2, Maurist edit., Paris, 1690).
7. 2 Cor 2. 28.
8. Ps 73. 3.
9. Ps 3. 2.