



Almsgiving: Love in a Troubled World

By Jill Rauh

Almsgiving, one of the three pillars of Lenten practice, means donating money and time to help others in need. With 46 million Americans living below the poverty line, children as victims of violence, and global conflicts that wreak havoc on families around the world, what kind of almsgiving are we called to practice this Lent?

Pope Benedict XVI's Lenten message for 2013 emphasizes the power of God's love to transform us. Our encounter with "God who is Love," Pope Benedict writes, necessarily opens our eyes to our neighbors. Almsgiving becomes more than just a donation in Lent. It is transformative, an experience of solidarity with others.

The pope's Lenten message mirrors what he said in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, or *God Is Love*, and in *Porta Fidei*, the guiding document to the Year of Faith. The pope notes that when transformed by Christ's love, we come to recognize the face of Christ in our brothers and sisters in need. We are compelled by faith to act for justice.

This is connected to what we do every Sunday: we gather as Christ's body, hear the Word of God, celebrate the Eucharistic meal, are transformed, and go out as disciples—on mission in the world.

We must work both to meet immediate needs through charitable works and to work for long-term change through social justice by addressing the root causes of social ills. We are called to walk with Two Feet of Love in Action.

Here are some ideas for how we can put love in action this Lent:

- Participate in CRS Rice Bowl, the program of Catholic Relief Services that invites people to pray with families and faith communities, fast in solidarity with the hungry, learn more about the challenges of poverty overseas and give alms to those in need.

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- Visit www.povertyusa.org or www.pobrezausa.org to learn about poverty in the United States and join the efforts of faith communities that are responding.
- Make a commitment to take action each week with Catholics Confront Global Poverty on behalf of vulnerable brothers and sisters around the world. (www.confrontglobalpoverty.org)
- Do a self-assessment of how you, or your parish, school or community put love into action.

There's much need in today's society. At the same time love in action can illuminate a world grown dim and give distressed people the courage to live and work in hope. Almsgiving helps meet physical needs and costs dollars, time, and commitment. But, more important, it nurtures hope, and that is priceless.

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