

March 22, 2009

Lent is a very privileged 40-day period during which we seek the face of Jesus who is Love Incarnate and the fount of divine mercy. Our prayer, fasting and abstinence, and works of charity help us recognize our own personal need for divine love and mercy, but also make us more attentive to our opportunities to be the compassionate hands of Jesus to those who are poor, disadvantaged, living in violence, and experiencing great suffering.

Each Lent, on the fourth Sunday, the Catholic Relief Services collection is taken up in all the parishes in the United States. Catholic Relief Services was founded by the Catholic bishops of the United States in 1943 as a concrete way for us to assist the poor and disadvantaged people outside of our country. It remains a way for us to express our solidarity with others in the human family who are victims of war, poverty, and social injustice.

For more than 60 years, Catholic Relief Services has enabled us to ease suffering and promote sustainable development and justice around the world. I served as a Board Member of CRS for six years and personally witnessed the significant effect CRS has in the 99 countries around the world where we bring hope to those in need.

I have seen how deeply our efforts have touched the lives of those with minimal shelter, food, potable water, education, and health care in Indonesia, East Timor, Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, and Tanzania. I cannot imagine a more effective way for Catholics in our country to carry out international solidarity and relief efforts abroad. As members of the Body of Christ, we reach out with compassion to those who are Jesus in disguise.

Our generosity to the CRS collection this weekend is multiplied many times over by the contributions of private donors, foundations, and corporations, as well as cash grants and in-kind donations we receive from the US government.

In light of discussions of waste in the media in recent months, you will be pleased to know that CRS is committed to sound stewardship of all resources and transparency. Approximately 94 percent of all revenue goes directly to the support of programming. CRS financial statements are audited annually by accredited accounting firms to verify that your dollars are used wisely in response to genuine human needs in the world's poorest countries.