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Pope urges support for large families

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Feb. 15, 2012

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI called on governments and communities to help large families, saying children represent hope and the well-being of every nation.

"There is no future without children," he said at the end of his general audience Wednesday in a greeting to members of an Italian association of large families.

"In today's social context, a family made up of many children constitutes a witness of faith, courage and optimism," he said.

"I hope that adequate social and legislative measures are promoted that safeguard and sustain large families, which represent richness and hope for the whole country," he said.

In his catechesis, the pope continued a series of talks on prayer by highlighting some of Jesus' prayers during his crucifixion.

Jesus' willingness to forgive his tormenters and executioners is an invitation to all Christians to forgive those who cause harm or are in the wrong, the pope said.

People should pray for those who have done them wrong with "the same attitude of mercy and love that God has for us," he said.

Jesus called on God to forgive his executioners as they nailed him to the cross and divided up his clothing. He said the soldiers "do not know what they are doing" and, by forgiving them, he showed "the depths of his reconciling love for humanity," which often sins out of ignorance, the pope said.

His prayer invites all Christians to follow the same "difficult gesture of also praying for those who do us wrong or hurt us -- always knowing to forgive so that God's light may illuminate their hearts," Pope Benedict said.

Jesus then prayed for the man crucified next to him -- the good thief -- who recognized Jesus as the Son of God and asked him to "remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus told him there would be a place for him in paradise, thereby giving the repentant man "unfaltering hope." His prayer shows "that God's goodness can touch us even at the last moment of life and that sincere prayer, even after a bad life, encounters the open arms of the good father," the pope said.

Jesus' final prayer on the cross was when he commended his spirit to God, showing his complete surrender to his father's will, the pope said.

"It shows us the certainty that no matter how hard the trials, difficult the problems and oppressive the suffering, we will never fall out of God's hands -- those hands that created us, sustain us and accompany us on the journey of life guided by an infinite and faithful love," he said.

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