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ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Bishops' message for Lent: "Poverty dehumanizes the country"

Manila (Agenzia Fides) - "Poverty in the Philippines degrades and dehumanizes millions of people. During this Lenten season in the Year of the Laity, we invite you to reflect on poverty, in particular on what contradicts God's Kingdom, and on what helps to promote the Kingdom": is what the Filipino Bishops say in a message signed by the President of the Episcopal Conference, His Exc. Msg. Socrates Villegas, Archbishop of Lingayen- Dagupan, released at the beginning of Lent. The text, sent to Fides Agency, highlights the poverty rate in the country which is over 20%, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics. This means that one Filipino out of five lives in a family that earns less than necessary to meet basic needs. This is "an unacceptable scandal", say the Bishops.
The President of the Conference recalls that there are different forms of poverty: "Poverty, which degrades and dehumanizes, which must be tackled with all means, and poverty which, paradoxically, humanizes and sanctifies", which is the one chosen by Christ. "We meet these opposite forms of poverty in three dimensions of human existence: material, moral and spiritual", he explained. If material poverty means lack of home, food , exclusion from health care and development, moral poverty destroys the Philippine nation, which the Bishops describe as "a pervasive cancer". At this level it is urgent to "seek the truth and restore integrity": indifferent silence, in fact, "contributes to the worsening of a corrupt system". Spiritual poverty appears in the forms of loneliness and despair, religious intolerance, in relativism and in having lost the meaning of transcendence.
"Healthy" poverty, that is evangelical - notes the message - is expressed in the sobriety of life, in choosing the essentials for everyday life, to simplify personal needs, not to chase consumerism. It is a form of simplicity that is also lived in relationships with others, with humility and that is imbued with "compassion and solidarity". (PA)
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