

## Message



Dear friends,

Caritas Bangladesh as social organization of the Catholic Bishops' Conference is committed for charity to all peoples irrespective of caste, color and creed.

Yes, true Charity must embrace all - true charity is meant to touch the lives of every brother and sister who are in need, which means all of us, whether poor and rich. Yes, in Charity, in works of charity, we are called to be present to all, rich and poor alike, albeit from different perspectives.

On earth no one of us is rich in everything, no one of us is poor in everything: riches and poverty are very mysteriously interwoven into our lives on earth, as if one is our right hand and the other our left,

together giving us balance to move on in life comfortably, without stumbling and falling. If we are identified as rich, let us consider quietly and humbly aspects of life in which we are poor, sinful or not - this then brings for us serenity of mind and heart, leading us to desire that spiritual dignity which dwells within us. If we are identified as poor, as so many of us are, let us consider also in humility aspects of life where we are given enriching gifts and strengths of body, mind and heart, not crushed out by the extremely difficult factors of life. At the end, we are all called to be rich in our inner self; and we are richer still, when rich and poor alike in sharing we intermingle our gifts and the lack of gifts with one another.

In Caritas the material goods that we take to the poor are already a collection of the gifts of the rich and of the poor put together by donor agencies and similar individuals and groups; in Caritas we, rich and poor together, work for the poor and destitute. Caritas will be merely a very dry organization for good works, if only the rich give and the poor only receive. Caritas becomes a community of charity and love, when we all, rich and poor alike, give and receive from each other's abundance. In this sharing takes place a wonderful intermingling of the material and spiritual gifts of life, creating a communion of the material and the spiritual.

In his Lenten Message this year the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has talked about the inner meaning of "fasting", and Caritas about "prayer and self-restraint for tolerance and peace" as its theme. Fasting is finally not merely giving up something, but giving up something as unhealthy excesses, for purification in order to achieve the beauty and sanctity of them. Prayer is a "fasting of the word", so that all our thinking and speaking is purified of all blemishes of hatred, malice and pride, then becoming like the word of God in our heart and on our lips. Fasting of food is not merely not eating, but learning to eat properly and with dignity, receiving all food as gift of God and gift of the earth and of work of human hands, food not to satisfy only our bodily hunger and desire, but as means to keep our body intact as friendly home for our living inner self and soul. Charity through good works is like a "fasting of love", in which we are freed from impure excesses of self-love to love purified and made beautiful through mercy and self-giving.

Seemingly our programs in Caritas most often are concerned about the material needs of the poor and destitute. Yes, material aspects of life are essential on this earth, and through that we are led to the inner spiritual things. Caritas is very much concerned to arrive at the spiritual things through the exercises in the material things of life.

Regarding the 60 million out of 150 million who are poor, Caritas endeavors within its capacity for their basic requirements of life. Providing basic literacy in the midst of large-scale illiteracy in the country is another program close to the heart of Caritas. To be at the side of those afflicted so unexpectedly by devastating calamities of cyclones and floods has been always a major concern in Caritas. Caritas is involved in many social issues regarding gender, minorities and marginalized population, and the disabled. The matter of adverse effects of Climate Change and its remedy in the world and in particular for Bangladesh is being taken up resolutely by Caritas. We hope for much result in this area through Caritas endeavors.

Joyfully we observe that members of Caritas family enter their daily work in Caritas in prayer, thus sealing themselves with that Faith we cherish in our heart and so magnificently cherished in the heart of our brothers and sisters all around us. They also take part in other spiritual exercises and programs of spiritual formation. All these will assist each of us to understand the truer meanings of our life and of our work, assisting and leading us into charity and love in Caritas.

With prayerful wishes and with regards, I remain.

**Most Rev. Theotonius Gomes, CSC**

Auxiliary Bishop of Dhaka, and  
President of Caritas Bangladesh