

PETER'S PENCE

Some historical notes

The Lord Jesus, during his public life dedicated to the preaching of the Kingdom of God, received material assistance to support himself and the group of the Twelve (*Lk 8:1-3*). From this assistance, they were able also to provide for the poor (*Jn 12:4-7*). After Pentecost, in the time of the Church, there was a need to support those who devoted themselves to the ministry (*1 Tim 5:17-18*). Saint Paul organized a collection organized among converts from paganism on behalf of the community at Jerusalem and justified it as paying back a "debt" to those who conveyed the gift of faith to them (*Rom 15:25-27*).

The term "Peter's Pence" has been used since the Middle Ages to describe the annual contribution made to the Holy See by states or local rulers. With the divisions in Europe that followed the Protestant Reformation, the relationship between the European monarchies and the Pope also changed.

In the modern era, when Pope Pius IX, after the revolutionary movements of 1848, had to leave Rome and take refuge in Gaeta, he found himself in a difficult economic situation. The Bishops of the United States collected twenty-five thousand dollars to help him. The *Comité Catholique* in France also suggested to the Bishops that they appeal to the generosity of the faithful.

Ten years later, when the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia occupied part of the Papal States, the Holy See once more found itself in economic difficulty. Meeting in Vienna in 1860, German-speaking Catholics created the "Association of Saint Michael", whose members committed themselves to contribute at least two pennies a month to the Pope. That same year, in France, Cardinal Louis de Bonald, the Archbishop of Lyon, undertook a similar effort that received the name *Denier de Saint-Pierre* ("Peter's Pence") and was established in every diocese.

The practice was definitively approved with the Encyclical Letter *Saepe Venerabiles* of 1871, in which Pope Pius IX thanked the Catholics of the whole world for the support he had received. This support proved indispensable for the functioning of the Roman Curia and thus for the exercise of the Pope's ministry as Pastor of the universal Church.

Throughout history, especially in recent times, the Popes have used the proceeds of donations received to meet the needs of peoples and dioceses afflicted by wars and natural disasters.

The Aims

Peter's Pence, as the expression itself signifies, represents an offering that, however small, has great meaning. Indeed, its value is not only practical but also strongly symbolic, as a sign of communion with the Pope. For this reason, it can be said that Peter's Pence is also the manifestation of a sense of belonging to the Church and of love for her visible head. Pope Benedict XVI wished to stress its particular ecclesial meaning: "Peter's Pence is the most characteristic expression of the participation of all the faithful in the Bishop of Rome's charitable initiatives in favour of the universal Church. It is... a sign of communion with the Pope and attention to the needs of one's brothers and sisters" (*Address to Members of the Saint Peter Circle*, 25 February 2006). Pope Francis summarizes a key to understanding this ecclesial sense in this way: "Jesus teaches us service, as the path of the Christian. The Christian lives to serve, not to be served" (*Homily, Mass at Santa Marta*, 26 April 2018). At present, the Peter's Pence collection is taken up throughout the Catholic world either on 29 June, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, or on the Sunday closest to this Solemnity.

Peter's Pence has a dual aim: 1) support for the universal mission of the Successor of Saint Peter, who, for this purpose, makes use of a group of offices called the Roman Curia (cf. canons 360-361 of the Code of Canon Law) and more than one hundred Pontifical Representatives throughout the world (cf. canons 362ff. of the Code of Canon Law); 2) support for the charitable works of the Pope on behalf of those most in need.

The Use of the Proceeds

At present, Peter's Pence is used mainly for the support of the central structures of the Church through which the Pope governs the universal Church. Yet within the Holy See, a process of study and reflection is underway to identify ways that would increasingly use Peter's Pence for charitable purposes. This would be possible, for example, in the case of a growth in the proceeds from the fund of canon 1271 of the Code of Canon Law.

The two aims – supporting the activities of the Holy See and contributing to initiatives of humanitarian assistance and development – are certainly not betrayed if part of the collection is invested ethically. As a result of investments, it is possible, in fact, to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the activity of the Holy See over time. This was recently reiterated by Pope Francis: "It is not good administration to receive a sum from Peter's Pence and put it in a drawer. No, this is bad administration. I look to make an investment, and when there is the need, to give. If in one year the capital does not lose value, if it maintains or grows, this is good administration".

Contributions according to Canon 1271 of the Code of Canon Law

Canon 1271 of the Code of Canon Law concerns Bishops who, by reason of their bond of unity with the Successor of Peter, and according to the possibilities of their own diocese, are also called to help in providing the Apostolic

See with the means it needs for its service to the universal Church. Unlike Peter's Pence, which is a free offering of the People of God, this contribution, provided for by law, does not have a charitable aim; rather, it is destined exclusively for the institutional activities of the Holy See.