

in our prayers for an end to such misfortunes. May the God of mercy hasten the day! Meanwhile we strive to mitigate, as far as in us lies, this excessive suffering. Therefore the step taken by our dear son, Cardinal Hartmann, Archbishop of Cologne, at whose request it was arranged that French or Belgian priests detained in Germany should have the treatment of officers, gave us great satisfaction, and we have expressed our thanks to him for his action.

"As regards Belgium, we have been informed that the faithful of that nation, so sorely tried, did not neglect, in their piety, to turn towards us their thoughts, and that even under the blow of so many calamities they proposed to gather this year, as in all preceding years, the offerings of St. Peter, which supply the necessities of the Apostolic See. This truly incomparable proof of piety and of attachment filled us with admiration; we accept it with all the affection that is due from a grateful heart; but having regard to the painful position in which our dear children are placed, we cannot bring ourselves to favour the fulfilment of that project, noble though it is. If any aims are to be gathered, our wish is that the money should be entirely devoted to the succour of the Belgian people, who are as illustrious by reason of their nobility and their piety as they are to-day worthy of all sympathy.

"Amid the difficulties and anxieties of the present hour we would remind the sons who are so dear to us that the arm of God is not shortened, that He is ever able to save, that His ear is not deaf to prayer.

"Let the hope of Divine aid increase with the approach of the festival of Christmas and of the mysteries that celebrate the birth of our Lord, and recall that peace which God proclaimed to mankind by His angels.

"May the souls of the suffering and afflicted find comfort and consolation in the assurance of the paternal tenderness that prompts our prayers. Yes, may God take pity upon the Belgian people, and grant them the abundance of all good.

"As a pledge of these prayers and good wishes, we now grant to all, and in the first place to you, Our dear son, the Apostolic Benediction.

"Given in Rome, by St. Peter's, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, in the year MCMXIV, the first of Our Pontificate."

"BENEDICT XV, POPE."

One last word, my dearest brethren. At the outset of these troubles I said to you that in the day of the liberation of our territory we should give to the Sacred Heart and to the Blessed Virgin a public testimony of our gratitude. Since that date I have been able to consult my colleagues in the Episcopate, and, in agreement with them, I now ask you to make, as soon as possible, a fresh effort to hasten the construction of the national basilica, promised by Belgium in honour of the Sacred Heart. As soon as the sun of peace shall shine upon our country, we shall redress our ruins, we shall restore shelter to those who have none, we shall rebuild our churches, we shall reconstitute our libraries, and we shall hope to crown this work of reconciliation by raising, upon the heights of the capital of Belgium, free and Catholic, that national basilica of the Sacred Heart. Furthermore, every year we shall make it our duty to celebrate solemnly, on the Friday following Corpus Christi, the festival of the Sacred Heart.

Lastly, in every region of the diocese the clergy will organize an annual pilgrimage of thanksgiving to one of the privileged sanctuaries of the Blessed Virgin, in order to pay especial honor to the Protectress of our national independence and universal Mediatrix of the Christian commonwealth.

The present letter shall be read on the following dates—on the first day of the year and on the Sundays following the day on which it shall severally reach you.

Accept, my dearest brethren, my wishes and prayers for you, and for the happiness of your families, and receive, I pray you, my paternal benediction.

D. J. MERCIER,

Archbishop of Malines.