

It is a ‘shameful tragedy’ people go hungry in the world, pope says

VATICAN CITY – One of the most urgent and critical social problems afflicting the world today is the “shameful tragedy that one-fifth of humanity still goes hungry,” Pope Benedict XVI told members of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

“Assuring an adequate food supply, like the protection of vital resources such as water and energy, requires all international leaders to collaborate in showing a readiness to work” toward eliminating social inequalities between countries and communities, he said in an address May 4.

“For Christians who regularly ask God to ‘give us this day our daily bread,’ it is a shameful tragedy” that so many people go hungry and are malnourished, he said.

Some 25,000 people die from hunger every day and one child dies every six seconds of malnutrition or starvation, according to the United Nations’ World Food Program.

The pope made his remarks during an audience with about 55 participants attending a plenary assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences.

The academy, headed by the former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, Mary Ann Glendon, was meeting May 1-5 to discuss Catholic social doctrine and human rights.

The meeting was specifically addressing rights that are currently under assault, such as the right to life, the right to build a family, freedom of conscience and religion, and the right to decent subsistence, Glendon said in her address to the pope.

The pope said there is “a flagrant contrast between the equal attribution of rights and the unequal access to the means of attaining those rights.”

World leaders need to work together and show solidarity toward the weakest regions and people on the globe in order to rectify these social inequalities and increase global security, he said.

The pope said human rights like the right to life and the right to freedom of conscience and religion are not, strictly speaking, truths of faith. Universal human rights spring from human nature itself, he said, and natural law is discernable to everyone, not just people of faith.

Reason enables all people “to distinguish not only between true and false, but also good and evil, better and worse, and justice and injustice,” he said.

The church works to promote human rights in such a way that “these rights can be presented to all people of good will, independently of any religious affiliation they may have,” he said.

However, human reason is always “in danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by disordered passions and sin,” and, therefore, reason “must undergo constant purification by faith,” he said.

If the ethical underpinnings of human rights are ignored, then those rights will remain fragile since they would be deprived of their solid and sound foundations, he said.