

Pope says life will be judged on acts of charity

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI said people's lives will be judged not on the basis of abstract ideals but on the concrete acts of charity.

In a Feb. 10 talk to Italian volunteer groups that provide medical assistance and blood donation programs, the pope said the organizations were helping to spread the "Gospel of God's love for all people."

Citing the Gospel of St. Matthew, he recalled that when Christ spoke of the last judgment he said people would be asked whether they fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger and opened their hearts to the needy.

"In a word, God at the final judgment will ask us if we have loved not in an abstract way, but with concrete acts. At the end of life, as St. John of the Cross liked to repeat, we will be judged on love," the pope said.

In the contemporary era marked by so many human and spiritual challenges, it is especially necessary for Christians to proclaim God's merciful love with good works, he said.

He said that while many people today don't find it easy to welcome Christ and his demanding teachings, they are very sensitive to concrete witnessing of charity by Christians.

"Love is a language that goes directly to the heart and opens it with trust," he said.

Among those attending the papal audience were members of the Italian National Confederation of the Misericordie, a network of more than 700 lay assistance groups that trace their history to the 13th century.

The pope said these confraternities, even though they are not technically church organizations today, help preserve the Christian roots of Europe.

He said it was important for such volunteer groups to remember that they are

communicating spiritual as well as material assistance to those in need.