

URBI ET ORBI MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

CHRISTMAS 2024

Central Loggia of Saint Peter's Basilica: Wednesday, 25 December 2024

Dear sisters and brothers, happy Christmas!

The mystery that never ceases to amaze and move us was renewed this night: the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus, the Son of God, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. That is how the shepherds of Bethlehem, filled with joy, found him, as the angels sang: "Glory to God and peace to men" (cf. *Luke* 2:6-14). Peace to men and women.

This event, which took place over two thousand years ago, is indeed made new thanks to the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit of Love and Life who made fruitful the womb of Mary and from her human flesh formed Jesus. Today, amid the travail of our times, the eternal Word of salvation is once more truly made incarnate, and speaks to every man and woman, to the whole world. This is the message: "I love you, I forgive you; come back to me, the door of my heart is open for you!"

Brothers and sisters, the door of God's heart is always open; let us return to him! Let us go back to the heart that loves and forgives us! Let us be forgiven by him; let us be reconciled with him! God always forgives! God forgives everything. Let us allow ourselves to be forgiven by him.

This is the meaning of the Holy Door of the Jubilee, which I opened last night here in Saint Peter's Basilica: it represents Jesus, the Door of salvation open for all. Jesus is the Door; the Door that the Father of mercies has opened in the midst of our world, in the midst of history, so that all of us can return to him. We are all like lost sheep; we need a Shepherd and a Door to return to the house of the Father. Jesus is that Shepherd; Jesus is the Door.

Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid! The Door is open, the door is wide open! There is no need to knock on the door. It is open. Come! Let us be reconciled with God, and then we will be reconciled with ourselves and able to be reconciled with one another, even our enemies. God's mercy can do all things. It unties every knot; it tears down every wall of division; God's mercy dispels hatred and the spirit of revenge. Come! Jesus is the Door of Peace.

Often we halt at the threshold of that Door; we lack the courage to cross it, because it challenges us to examine our lives. Entering through that Door calls for the sacrifice involved in taking a step forward, a small sacrifice. Taking a step towards something so great calls us to leave behind our disputes and divisions, and surrendering ourselves to the outstretched arms of the Child who is the Prince of Peace. This Christmas, at the beginning of the Jubilee Year, I invite every individual, and all peoples and nations, to find the courage needed to walk through that Door, to become pilgrims of hope, to silence the sound of arms and overcome divisions!

May the sound of arms be silenced in war-torn Ukraine! May there be the boldness needed to open the door to negotiation and to gestures of dialogue and encounter, in order to achieve a just and lasting peace.

May the sound of arms be silenced in the Middle East! In contemplating the Crib of Bethlehem, I think of the Christian communities in Palestine and in Israel, particularly the dear community in Gaza, where the humanitarian situation is extremely grave. May there be a ceasefire, may the hostages be released and aid be given to the people worn out by hunger and by war. I express my closeness to the Christian community in Lebanon, especially in the south, and to that of Syria, at this most delicate time. May the doors of dialogue

and peace be flung open throughout the region, devastated by conflict. Here I also think of the Libyan people and encourage them to seek solutions that enable national reconciliation.

May the birth of the Saviour bring a new season of hope to the families of thousands of children who are dying from an outbreak of measles in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for the people of the East of that country, and of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Mozambique. The humanitarian crisis that affects them is caused mainly by armed conflicts and the scourge of terrorism, aggravated by the devastating effects of climate change, resulting in the loss of life and the displacement of millions of people. My thoughts also turn to the peoples of the nations of the Horn of Africa, for whom I implore the gifts of peace, concord and fraternity. May the Son of the Most High sustain the efforts of the international community to facilitate access to humanitarian aid for the civilian population of Sudan and to initiate new negotiations for a ceasefire.

May the proclamation of Christmas bring comfort to the people of Myanmar, who, due to the ongoing clash of arms, suffer greatly and are forced to flee their homes.

May the Infant Jesus inspire the political authorities and all people of good will on the American continent to find as soon as possible effective solutions, in justice and truth, to promote social harmony, particularly in Haiti, Venezuela, Colombia and Nicaragua. May they work, particularly during this Jubilee Year, to advance the common good and respect the dignity of each person, surmounting political divisions.

May the Jubilee be an opportunity to tear down all walls of separation: the ideological walls that so often mark political life, and also physical walls, such as the division that has affected the island of Cyprus for fifty years now and has rent its human and social fabric. It is my hope that a mutually agreed solution will be found, a solution that can put an end to the division in full respect for the rights and dignity of all the Cypriot communities.

Jesus, the eternal Word of God made incarnate, is the wide-open Door; he is the wide-open Door that we are invited to enter, in order to rediscover the meaning of our existence and the sacredness of all life – for every life is sacred – and to recover the foundational values of the human family. He awaits us at the threshold. He awaits each one of us, especially the most vulnerable. He awaits the children, all those children who suffer from war and hunger. He awaits the elderly, so often forced to live in conditions of solitude and abandonment. He awaits those who have lost their homes or are fleeing their homelands in an effort to find a safe haven. He awaits all those who have lost their jobs or are unable to find work. He awaits prisoners who, everything notwithstanding, are still children of God, always children of God. He awaits all those – and there are many of them – who endure persecution for their faith.

On this festive day, let us not fail to express our gratitude to those who spend themselves, quietly and faithfully, in doing good and in serving others. I think of parents, educators and teachers, who have the great responsibility of forming future generations. I think too of healthcare workers, the forces of order and all those men and women who carry out works of charity, especially missionaries throughout the world: they bring light and comfort to so many people in difficulty. To all of them we want to say: Thank you!

Brothers and sisters, may the Jubilee be an opportunity to forgive debts, especially those that burden the poorest countries. Each of us is called to forgive those who have trespassed against us, because the Son of God, born in the cold and darkness of the night, has forgiven our own. He came to heal us and forgive us. As pilgrims of hope, let us go out to meet him! Let us open to him the doors of our hearts. Let us open to him the doors of our hearts, as he has opened to us the door of his heart.

I wish everyone a serene and blessed Christmas.