

Pope Francis' Christmas wish for fraternity

The following is the official English translation of Pope Francis' 'Urbi et Orbi' (to the city and the world) message, given at the Vatican on Dec. 25.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Happy Christmas!

To you, the faithful of Rome, to you, the pilgrims, and to all who are linked to us from every part of the world, I renew the joyous proclamation of Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he favours" (Lk 2:14).

Like the shepherds who first went with haste to the stable, let us halt in wonder before the sign that God has given us: "A baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:12). In silence, let us fall to our knees and worship.

What does that Child, born for us of the Virgin Mary, have to tell us? What is the universal message of Christmas? It is that God is a good Father and we are all brothers and sisters.

This truth is the basis of the Christian vision of humanity. Without the fraternity that Jesus Christ has bestowed on us, our efforts for a more just world fall short, and even our best plans and projects risk being soulless and empty.

For this reason, my wish for a happy Christmas is a wish for fraternity.

Fraternity among individuals of every nation and culture.

Fraternity among people with different ideas, yet capable of respecting and listening to one another.

Fraternity among persons of different religions. Jesus came to

reveal the face of God to all those who seek him.

The face of God has been revealed in a human face. It did not appear in an angel, but in one man, born in a specific time and place. By his incarnation, the Son of God tells us that salvation comes through love, acceptance, respect for this poor humanity of ours, which we all share in a great variety of races, languages, and cultures. Yet all of us are brothers and sisters in humanity!

Our differences, then, are not a detriment or a danger; they are a source of richness. As when an artist is about to make a mosaic: it is better to have tiles of many colors available, rather than just a few!

The experience of families teaches us this: as brothers and sisters, we are all different from each other. We do not always agree, but there is an unbreakable bond uniting us, and the love of our parents helps us to love one another. The same is true for the larger human family, but here, God is our "parent," the foundation and strength of our fraternity.

May this Christmas help us to rediscover the bonds of fraternity linking us together as individuals and joining all peoples. May it enable Israelis and Palestinians to resume dialogue and undertake a journey of peace that can put an end to a conflict that for over 70 years has rent the land chosen by the Lord to show his face of love.

May the Child Jesus allow the beloved and beleaguered country of Syria once again to find fraternity after these long years of war. May the international community work decisively for a political solution that can put aside divisions and partisan interests, so that the Syrian people, especially all those who were forced to leave their own lands and seek refuge elsewhere, can return to live in peace in their own country.

My thoughts turn to Yemen, in the hope that the truce brokered by the international community may finally bring relief to all

those children and people exhausted by war and famine.

I think too of Africa, where millions of persons are refugees or displaced and in need of humanitarian assistance and food security. May the Holy Child, the King of Peace, silence the clash of arms and allow a new dawn of fraternity to rise over the entire continent, blessing the efforts of all those who work to promote paths of reconciliation in political and social life.



Pope Francis' Christmas message and blessing focused on fraternity among all peoples. CNS photo via Vatican Media

May Christmas consolidate the bonds of fraternity uniting the Korean peninsula and help the path of rapprochement recently undertaken to continue and to reach agreed solutions capable of ensuring the development and well-being of all.

May this blessed season allow Venezuela once more to recover social harmony and enable all the members of society to work fraternally for the country's development and to aid the most vulnerable sectors of the population.

May the Newborn Lord bring relief to the beloved land of Ukraine, yearning to regain a lasting peace that is slow to

come. Only with a peace respectful of the rights of every nation can the country recover from the sufferings it has endured and restore dignified living conditions for its citizens. I am close to the Christian communities of the region, and I pray that they may develop relationships of fraternity and friendship.

Before the Child Jesus, may the inhabitants of beloved Nicaragua see themselves once more as brothers and sisters, so that divisions and discord will not prevail, but all may work to promote reconciliation and to build together the future of the country.

I want to mention, too, all those peoples that experience ideological, cultural and economic forms of colonization and see their freedom and identity compromised, as well as those suffering from hunger and the lack of educational and health care services.

A particular thought goes to our brothers and sisters who celebrate the Birth of the Lord in difficult, if not hostile situations, especially where the Christian community is a minority, often vulnerable or not taken into account. May the Lord grant that they, and all minorities, may live in peace and see their rights recognized, especially the right to religious freedom.

May the little Child whom we contemplate today in the manger, in the cold of the night, watch over all the children of the world, and every frail, vulnerable and discarded person. May all of us receive peace and consolation from the birth of the Savior and, in the knowledge that we are loved by the one heavenly Father, realize anew that we are brothers and sisters and come to live as such!