

Pope's Peace Day Message: Fraternity is foundation of peace

NCR Staff | Dec. 12, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

THE POPE'S MESSAGE FOR WORLD DAY FOR PEACE

Vatican City, 12 December 2013 (VIS) - "Fraternity as the foundation of peace and as the pathway to peace" is the title chosen by Pope Francis for his first message for the 47th World Day for Peace, which will be celebrated on 1 January 2014. The document, dated 8 December, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, consists of ten points, including a brief prologue and a conclusion, structured in relation to two biblical quotations: "Where is your brother?" (Genesis 4:9) and "And you will all be brothers" (Matthew 23:8), and six phrases describing attributes of fraternity: "Fraternity, the foundation and pathway to peace", "Fraternity, a prerequisite for fighting poverty", "The rediscovery of fraternity in the economy", "Fraternity extinguishes war", "Corruption and organized crime threaten fraternity" and "Fraternity helps to preserve and cultivate nature".

The full text of the message is published below:

"In this, my first Message for the World Day of Peace, I wish to offer to everyone, individuals and peoples, my best wishes for a life filled with joy and hope. In the heart of every man and woman is the desire for a full life, including that irrepressible longing for fraternity which draws us to fellowship with others and enables us to see them not as enemies or rivals, but as brothers and sisters to be accepted and embraced.

Fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and to treat each person as a true sister or brother; without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace. We should remember that fraternity is generally first learned in the family, thanks above all to the responsible and complementary roles of each of its members, particularly the father and the mother. The family is the wellspring of all fraternity, and as such it is the foundation and the first pathway to peace, since, by its vocation, it is meant to spread its love to the world around it.

The ever-increasing number of interconnections and communications in today's world makes us powerfully aware of the unity and common destiny of the nations. In the dynamics of history, and in the diversity of ethnic groups, societies and cultures, we see the seeds of a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another. But this vocation is still frequently denied and ignored in a world marked by a "globalization of indifference" which makes us slowly inured to the suffering of others and closed in on ourselves.

In many parts of the world, there seems to be no end to grave offences against fundamental human rights, especially the right to life and the right to religious freedom. The tragic phenomenon of human trafficking, in which the unscrupulous prey on the lives and the desperation of others, is but one unsettling example of this. Alongside overt armed conflicts are the less visible but no less cruel wars fought in the economic and financial sectors with means which are equally destructive of lives, families and businesses.

Globalisation, as Benedict XVI pointed out, makes us neighbours, but does not make us brothers. The many

situations of inequality, poverty and injustice, are signs not only of a profound lack of fraternity, but also of the absence of a culture of solidarity. New ideologies, characterized by rampant individualism, egocentrism and materialistic consumerism, weaken social bonds, fuelling that 'throwaway' mentality which leads to contempt for, and the abandonment of, the weakest and those considered 'useless'. In this way human coexistence increasingly tends to resemble a mere *do ut des* which is both pragmatic and selfish.

At the same time, it appears clear that contemporary ethical systems remain incapable of producing authentic bonds of fraternity, since a fraternity devoid of reference to a common Father as its ultimate foundation is unable to endure. True brotherhood among people presupposes and demands a transcendent Fatherhood. Based on the recognition of this fatherhood, human fraternity is consolidated: each person becomes a 'neighbour' who cares for others.

'Where is your brother?' (Gen 4:9)

2. To understand more fully this human vocation to fraternity, to recognise more clearly the obstacles standing in the way of its realisation and to identify ways of overcoming them, it is of primary importance to let oneself be led by knowledge of God's plan, which is presented in an eminent way in sacred Scripture.

According to the biblical account of creation, all people are descended from common parents, Adam and Eve, the couple created by God in his image and likeness, to whom Cain and Abel were born. In the story of this first family, we see the origins of society and the evolution of relations between individuals and peoples.

Abel is a shepherd, Cain is a farmer. Their profound identity and their vocation is to be brothers, albeit in the diversity of their activity and culture, their way of relating to God and to creation. Cain's murder of Abel bears tragic witness to his radical rejection of their vocation to be brothers. Their story brings out the difficult task to which all men and women are called, to live as one, each taking care of the other. Cain, incapable of accepting God's preference for Abel who had offered him the best of his flock ? 'The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering; but for Cain and his offering he had no regard' ? killed Abel out of jealousy. In this way, he refused to regard Abel as a brother, to relate to him rightly, to live in the presence of God by assuming his responsibility to care for and to protect others. By asking him 'Where is your brother?', God holds Cain accountable for what he has done. He answers: 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'. Then, the Book of Genesis tells us, 'Cain went away from the presence of the Lord'.

We need to ask ourselves what were the real reasons which led Cain to disregard the bond of fraternity and, at the same time, the bond of reciprocity and fellowship which joined him to his brother Abel. God himself condemns and reproves Cain's collusion with evil: 'sin is crouching at your door'. But Cain refuses to turn against evil and decides instead to raise his 'hand against his brother Abel', thus scorning God's plan. In this way, he thwarts his primordial calling to be a child of God and to live in fraternity.

The story of Cain and Abel teaches that we have an inherent calling to fraternity, but also the tragic capacity to betray that calling. This is witnessed by our daily acts of selfishness, which are at the root of so many wars and so much injustice: many men and women die at the hands of their brothers and sisters who are incapable of seeing themselves as such, that is, as beings made for reciprocity, for communion and self-giving.

?And you will all be brothers? (Mt 23:8)

3. The question naturally arises: Can the men and women of this world ever fully respond to the longing for fraternity placed within them by God the Father? Will they ever manage by their power alone to overcome indifference, egoism and hatred, and to accept the legitimate differences typical of brothers and sisters?

By paraphrasing his words, we can summarize the answer given by the Lord Jesus: 'For you have only one

Father, who is God, and you are all brothers and sisters'. The basis of fraternity is found in God's fatherhood. We are not speaking of a generic fatherhood, indistinct and historically ineffectual, but rather of the specific and extraordinarily concrete personal love of God for each man and woman. It is a fatherhood, then, which effectively generates fraternity, because the love of God, once welcomed, becomes the most formidable means of transforming our lives and relationships with others, opening us to solidarity and to genuine sharing.

In a particular way, human fraternity is regenerated in and by Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. The Cross is the definitive foundational locus of that fraternity which human beings are not capable of generating themselves. Jesus Christ, who assumed human nature in order to redeem it, loving the Father unto death on the Cross, has through his resurrection made of us a new humanity, in full communion with the will of God, with his plan, which includes the full realization of our vocation to fraternity.

From the beginning, Jesus takes up the plan of the Father, acknowledging its primacy over all else. But Christ, with his abandonment to death for love of the Father, becomes the definitive and new principle of us all; we are called to regard ourselves in him as brothers as sisters, inasmuch as we are children of the same Father. He himself is the Covenant; in his person we are reconciled with God and with one another as brothers and sisters. Jesus' death on the Cross also brings an end to the separation between peoples, between the people of the Covenant and the people of the Gentiles, who were bereft of hope until that moment, since they were not party to the pacts of the Promise. As we read in the Letter to the Ephesians, Jesus Christ is the one who reconciles all people in himself. He is peace, for he made one people out of the two, breaking down the wall of separation which divided them, that is, the hostility between them. He created in himself one people, one new man, one new humanity.

All who accept the life of Christ and live in him acknowledge God as Father and give themselves completely to him, loving him above all things. The reconciled person sees in God the Father of all, and, as a consequence, is spurred on to live a life of fraternity open to all. In Christ, the other is welcomed and loved as a son or daughter of God, as a brother or sister, not as a stranger, much less as a rival or even an enemy. In God's family, where all are sons and daughters of the same Father, and, because they are grafted to Christ, sons and daughters in the Son, there are no 'disposable lives. All men and women enjoy an equal and inviolable dignity. All are loved by God. All have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, who died on the Cross and rose for all. This is the reason why no one can remain indifferent before the lot of our brothers and sisters.

Fraternity, the foundation and pathway to peace

4. This being said, it is easy to realise that fraternity is the foundation and pathway of peace. The social encyclicals written by my predecessors can be very helpful in this regard. It would be sufficient to draw on the definitions of peace found in the encyclicals *'Populorum progressio'* by Pope Paul VI and *'Sollicitudo rei socialis'* by John Paul II. From the first we learn that the integral development of peoples is the new name of peace. From the second, we conclude that peace is an *opus solidaritatis*.

Paul VI stated that not only individuals but nations too must encounter one another in a spirit of fraternity. As he says: 'In this mutual understanding and friendship, in this sacred communion, we must also 'work together to build the common future of the human race'. In the first place, this duty falls to those who are most privileged. Their obligations are rooted in human and supernatural fraternity and are manifested in three ways: the duty of solidarity, which requires the richer nations to assist the less developed; the duty of social justice, which requires the realignment of relationships between stronger and weaker peoples in terms of greater fairness; and the duty of universal charity, which entails the promotion of a more humane world for all, a world in which each has something to give and to receive, without the progress of the one constituting an obstacle to the development of the other.

If, then, we consider peace as *opus solidaritatis*, we cannot fail to acknowledge that fraternity is its principal

foundation. Peace, John Paul II affirmed, is an indivisible good. Either it is the good of all or it is the good of none. It can be truly attained and enjoyed, as the highest quality of life and a more human and sustainable development, only if all are guided by solidarity as 'a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good'. This means not being guided by a 'desire for profit' or a 'thirst for power'. What is needed is the willingness to 'lose ourselves' for the sake of others rather than exploiting them, and to 'serve them' instead of oppressing them for our own advantage. 'The other ? whether a person, people or nation ? [is to be seen] not just as some kind of instrument, with a work capacity and physical strength to be exploited at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful, but as our neighbour, a helper'.

Christian solidarity presumes that our neighbour is loved not only as 'a human being with his or her own rights and a fundamental equality with everyone else, but as the living image of God the Father, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and placed under the permanent action of the Holy Spirit', as another brother or sister. As John Paul II noted: 'At that point, awareness of the common fatherhood of God, of the brotherhood of all in Christ ? ?children in the Son? ? and of the presence and life-giving action of the Holy Spirit, will bring to our vision of the world a new criterion for interpreting it', for changing it.

Fraternity, a prerequisite for fighting poverty

5. In his encyclical 'Caritas in veritate', my predecessor reminded the world how the lack of fraternity between peoples and men and women is a significant cause of poverty. In many societies, we are experiencing a profound poverty of relationships as a result of the lack of solid family and community relationships. We are concerned by the various types of hardship, marginalisation, isolation and various forms of pathological dependencies which we see increasing. This kind of poverty can be overcome only through the rediscovery and valuing of fraternal relationships in the heart of families and communities, through the sharing of joys and sorrows, of the hardships and triumphs that are a part of human life.

Moreover, if on the one hand we are seeing a reduction in absolute poverty, on the other hand we cannot fail to recognise that there is a serious rise in relative poverty, that is, instances of inequality between people and groups who live together in particular regions or in a determined historical-cultural context. In this sense, effective policies are needed to promote the principle of fraternity, securing for people ? who are equal in dignity and in fundamental rights ? access to capital, services, educational resources, healthcare and technology so that every person has the opportunity to express and realise his or her life project and can develop fully as a person.

One also sees the need for policies which can lighten an excessive imbalance between incomes. We must not forget the Church's teaching on the so-called social mortgage, which holds that although it is lawful, as Saint Thomas Aquinas says, and indeed necessary 'that people have ownership of goods', insofar as their use is concerned, 'they possess them as not just their own, but common to others as well, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as themselves'.

Finally, there is yet another form of promoting fraternity ? and thus defeating poverty ? which must be at the basis of all the others. It is the detachment of those who choose to live a sober and essential lifestyle, of those who, by sharing their own wealth, thus manage to experience fraternal communion with others. This is fundamental for following Jesus Christ and being truly Christian. It is not only the case of consecrated persons who profess the vow of poverty, but also of the many families and responsible citizens who firmly believe that it is their fraternal relationship with their neighbours which constitutes their most precious good.

The rediscovery of fraternity in the economy

6. The grave financial and economic crises of the present time ? which find their origin in the progressive distancing of man from God and from his neighbour, in the greedy pursuit of material goods on the one hand,

and in the impoverishment of interpersonal and community relations on the other ? have pushed man to seek satisfaction, happiness and security in consumption and earnings out of all proportion to the principles of a sound economy. In 1979 John Paul II had called attention to 'a real perceptible danger that, while man's dominion over the world of things is making enormous advances, he should lose the essential threads of his dominion and in various ways let his humanity be subjected to the world and become himself something subject to manipulation in many ways ? even if the manipulation is often not perceptible directly ? through the whole of the organization of community life, through the production system and through pressure from the means of social communication'.

The succession of economic crises should lead to a timely rethinking of our models of economic development and to a change in lifestyles. Today's crisis, even with its serious implications for people's lives, can also provide us with a fruitful opportunity to rediscover the virtues of prudence, temperance, justice and strength. These virtues can help us to overcome difficult moments and to recover the fraternal bonds which join us one to another, with deep confidence that human beings need and are capable of something greater than maximizing their individual interest. Above all, these virtues are necessary for building and preserving a society in accord with human dignity.

Fraternity extinguishes war

7. In the past year, many of our brothers and sisters have continued to endure the destructive experience of war, which constitutes a grave and deep wound inflicted on fraternity.

Many conflicts are taking place amid general indifference. To all those who live in lands where weapons impose terror and destruction, I assure you of my personal closeness and that of the whole Church, whose mission is to bring Christ's love to the defenceless victims of forgotten wars through her prayers for peace, her service to the wounded, the starving, refugees, the displaced and all those who live in fear. The Church also speaks out in order to make leaders hear the cry of pain of the suffering and to put an end to every form of hostility, abuse and the violation of fundamental human rights.

For this reason, I appeal forcefully to all those who sow violence and death by force of arms: in the person you today see simply as an enemy to be beaten, discover rather your brother or sister, and hold back your hand! Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust, and hope around you! 'From this standpoint, it is clear that, for the world's peoples, armed conflicts are always a deliberate negation of international harmony, and create profound divisions and deep wounds which require many years to heal. Wars are a concrete refusal to pursue the great economic and social goals that the international community has set itself?.

Nevertheless, as long as so great a quantity of arms are in circulation as at present, new pretexts can always be found for initiating hostilities. For this reason, I make my own the appeal of my predecessors for the non-proliferation of arms and for disarmament of all parties, beginning with nuclear and chemical weapons disarmament.

We cannot however fail to observe that international agreements and national laws ? while necessary and greatly to be desired ? are not of themselves sufficient to protect humanity from the risk of armed conflict. A conversion of hearts is needed which would permit everyone to recognise in the other a brother or sister to care for, and to work together with, in building a fulfilling life for all. This is the spirit which inspires many initiatives of civil society, including religious organisations, to promote peace. I express my hope that the daily commitment of all will continue to bear fruit and that there will be an effective application in international law of the right to peace, as a fundamental human right and a necessary prerequisite for every other right.

Corruption and organized crime threaten fraternity

8. The horizon of fraternity also has to do with the need for fulfilment of every man and woman. People's legitimate ambitions, especially in the case of the young, should not be thwarted or offended, nor should people be robbed of their hope of realising them. Nevertheless, ambition must not be confused with the abuse of power. On the contrary, people should compete with one another in mutual esteem. In disagreements, which are also an unavoidable part of life, we should always remember that we are brothers and sisters, and therefore teach others and teach ourselves not to consider our neighbour as an enemy or as an adversary to be eliminated.

Fraternity generates social peace because it creates a balance between freedom and justice, between personal responsibility and solidarity, between the good of individuals and the common good. And so a political community must act in a transparent and responsible way to favour all this. Citizens must feel themselves represented by the public authorities in respect for their freedom. Yet frequently a wedge is driven between citizens and institutions by partisan interests which disfigure that relationship, fostering the creation of an enduring climate of conflict.

An authentic spirit of fraternity overcomes the individual selfishness which conflicts with people's ability to live in freedom and in harmony among themselves. Such selfishness develops socially – whether it is in the many forms of corruption, so widespread today, or in the formation of criminal organizations, from small groups to those organised on a global scale. These groups tear down legality and justice, striking at the very heart of the dignity of the person. These organisations gravely offend God, they hurt others and they harm creation, all the more so when they have religious overtones.

I also think of the heartbreaking drama of drug abuse, which reaps profits in contempt of the moral and civil laws. I think of the devastation of natural resources and ongoing pollution, and the tragedy of the exploitation of labour. I think too of illicit money trafficking and financial speculation, which often prove both predatory and harmful for entire economic and social systems, exposing millions of men and women to poverty. I think of prostitution, which every day reaps innocent victims, especially the young, robbing them of their future. I think of the abomination of human trafficking, crimes and abuses against minors, the horror of slavery still present in many parts of the world; the frequently overlooked tragedy of migrants, who are often victims of disgraceful and illegal manipulation. As John XXIII wrote: 'There is nothing human about a society based on relationships of power. Far from encouraging, as it should, the attainment of people's growth and perfection, it proves oppressive and restrictive of their freedom'. Yet human beings can experience conversion; they must never despair of being able to change their lives. I wish this to be a message of hope and confidence for all, even for those who have committed brutal crimes, for God does not wish the death of the sinner, but that he converts and lives.

In the broad context of human social relations, when we look to crime and punishment, we cannot help but think of the inhumane conditions in so many prisons, where those in custody are often reduced to a subhuman status in violation of their human dignity and stunted in their hope and desire for rehabilitation. The Church does much in these environments, mostly in silence. I exhort and I encourage everyone to do more, in the hope that the efforts being made in this area by so many courageous men and women will be increasingly supported, fairly and honestly, by the civil authorities as well.

Fraternity helps to preserve and cultivate nature

9. The human family has received from the Creator a common gift: nature. The Christian view of creation includes a positive judgement about the legitimacy of interventions on nature if these are meant to be beneficial and are performed responsibly, that is to say, by acknowledging the 'grammar' inscribed in nature and by wisely using resources for the benefit of all, with respect for the beauty, finality and usefulness of every living

being and its place in the ecosystem. Nature, in a word, is at our disposition and we are called to exercise a responsible stewardship over it. Yet so often we are driven by greed and by the arrogance of dominion, possession, manipulation and exploitation; we do not preserve nature; nor do we respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations.

In a particular way, the agricultural sector is the primary productive sector with the crucial vocation of cultivating and protecting natural resources in order to feed humanity. In this regard the continuing disgrace of hunger in the world moves me to share with you the question: How are we using the earth's resources? Contemporary societies should reflect on the hierarchy of priorities to which production is directed. It is a truly pressing duty to use the earth's resources in such a way that all may be free from hunger. Initiatives and possible solutions are many, and are not limited to an increase in production. It is well known that present production is sufficient, and yet millions of persons continue to suffer and die from hunger, and this is a real scandal. We need, then, to find ways by which all may benefit from the fruits of the earth, not only to avoid the widening gap between those who have more and those who must be content with the crumbs, but above all because it is a question of justice, equality and respect for every human being. In this regard I would like to remind everyone of that necessary universal destination of all goods which is one of the fundamental principles of the Church's social teaching. Respect for this principle is the essential condition for facilitating an effective and fair access to those essential and primary goods which every person needs and to which he or she has a right.

Conclusion

10. Fraternity needs to be discovered, loved, experienced, proclaimed and witnessed to. But only love, bestowed as a gift from God, enables us to accept and fully experience fraternity.

The necessary realism proper to politics and economy cannot be reduced to mere technical know-how bereft of ideals and unconcerned with the transcendent dimension of man. When this openness to God is lacking, every human activity is impoverished and persons are reduced to objects that can be exploited. Only when politics and the economy are open to moving within the wide space ensured by the One who loves each man and each woman, will they achieve an ordering based on a genuine spirit of fraternal charity and become effective instruments of integral human development and peace.

We Christians believe that in the Church we are all members of a single body, all mutually necessary, because each has been given a grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ, for the common good. Christ has come to the world so as to bring us divine grace, that is, the possibility of sharing in his life. This entails weaving a fabric of fraternal relationships marked by reciprocity, forgiveness and complete self-giving, according to the breadth and the depth of the love of God offered to humanity in the One who, crucified and risen, draws all to himself: 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'. This is the good news that demands from each one a step forward, a perennial exercise of empathy, of listening to the suffering and the hopes of others, even those furthest away from me, and walking the demanding path of that love which knows how to give and spend itself freely for the good of all our brothers and sisters.

Christ embraces all of humanity and wishes no one to be lost. 'For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him'. He does it without oppressing or constraining anyone to open to him the doors of heart and mind. 'Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves' ? Jesus Christ says ? 'I am among you as one who serves'. Every activity therefore must be distinguished by an attitude of service to persons, especially those furthest away and less known. Service is the soul of that fraternity that builds up peace.

May Mary, the Mother of Jesus, help us to understand and live every day the fraternity that springs up from the

heart of her Son, so as to bring peace to each person on this our beloved earth.?

Source URL (retrieved on 03/06/2015 - 06:55): <http://ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/popes-peace-day-message-fraternity-foundation-peace>