



Pope Francis celebrates the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

The lesson of the Magi

Re-learning how to worship, adore and contemplate God



A change of stride

ANDREA MONDA

The Holy Father said it many times throughout the course of this long, now-concluded year 2020: crisis transforms us; at the end of a crisis we are different than we were before, whether better or worse, but different.

On the last day of the year, a painful bout of sciatica constrained the Pope, who was unable to preside the year ending and beginning rites. This sciatic nerve pain is not new to him but the timing of the small and simple “clinical” episode strikes a chord, transporting it to a symbolic level. Thoughts wander to the biblical text and in particular to the sciatica that struck Jacob at the end of his night-time encounter/struggle with the angel of the Lord at the ford of the Jabbok. It is the episode of Jacob’s struggle with God (Gen 32:23-33), a “mysterious event”, as Romano Guardini observed, which “sinks down into the memory and remains embedded there. Perhaps one does not understand it, or one feels it is full of the most sacred reality. One ponders it, takes it out, and always finds in it something more”. At the end of the episode, after the difficult nighttime struggle, day breaks, and with the sunrise we see Jacob limping because of his thigh – his sciatic nerve was injured – after his “thigh was put out of joint”. The fight, a fast-paced hand-to-hand battle with many twists and turns, took place during the night, when “Jacob was left alone”.

This 2020 was the long night in which humanity found itself alone, fighting a dogged battle whose end, a new sunrise, we could only glimpse in recent days. Of this year, everyone will remember the images of 27 March, with the Pope alone in the rain as the sun set on a dark evening, emerging into the desolation of Saint Peter’s Square to beseech the Lord, almost like Noah, who in the flood sought salvation on behalf of everyone. Pope Francis, like Noah but now also like Jacob, who walked in the light of dawn with a sense of strength and more confidence because he had asked for and received the blessing from the angel of the Lord and heard his words: “you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed!”. He is not the same Francis as before, as a year ago, just as it was for the biblical patriarch (whose name God also changed from Jacob to Israel), and both have a limp. They had to alter their stride. It is crisis that brings this on:

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SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Pope Francis celebrates Mass on the Solemnity of the Epiphany

The example of the Magi is a lesson on worship

On Wednesday morning, 6 January, Solemnity of the Epiphany, Pope Francis presided Holy Mass at the Altar of the Cathedral in Saint Peter's Basilica. The celebration was preceded by the recitation of the Rosary. At the moment of the Eucharistic celebration which included the presence of 20 Cardinals, Cardinal Dean Giovanni Battista Re and Vice Dean Cardinal Leonardo Sandri approached the altar. After the Gospel Reading an announcement was made proclaiming that this year Easter will be celebrated on 4 April. During the prayers of the faithful, young Churches and those of ancient tradition were remembered, and the hope was expressed that they may continue to grow together and help each other as sister churches in their shared commitment to inspire new disciples of the Gospel. Prayers were also offered for the shepherds of the People of God and for those who cooperate

The Evangelist Matthew tells us that the Magi, when they came to Bethlehem, "saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him" (Mt 2:11). Worshipping the Lord is not easy; it does not just happen. It requires a certain spiritual maturity and is the fruit of an at times lengthy interior journey. Worshipping God is not something we do spontaneously. True, human beings have a need to worship, but we can risk missing the goal. Indeed, if we do not worship God, we will worship idols – there is no middle way, it is either God or idols; or, to use the words of a French writer: "Whoever does not worship God, worships the devil" – and instead of becoming believers, we will become idolaters. It is just like that, *aut aut*. In our day, it is particularly necessary for us, both as individuals and as communities, to devote more time to worship. We need to learn ever better how to contemplate the Lord. We have somewhat lost the

meaning of the prayer of adoration, so we must take it up again, both in our communities and in our own spiritual life. Today, then, let us learn a few useful lessons from the Magi. Like them, we want to fall down and worship the Lord. To worship him seriously, not as Herod said: "Let me know where the place is and I will go to worship him". No, that worship is not good. Ours must be serious! The Liturgy of the Word offers us three phrases that can help us to understand more fully what it means to be worshipers of the Lord. They are: "to lift up our eyes", "to set out on a journey" and "to see". These three phrases can help us to understand what it means to be a worshiper of the Lord. The first phrase, *to lift up our eyes*, comes to us from the prophet Isaiah. To the community of Jerusalem, recently returned from exile and disheartened by great challenges and hardships, the prophet addresses

with them, that in imitation of the Virgin Mary they may proclaim Christ, the true light of the world, to those near and far. Prayers were also raised for missionaries throughout the world, that by sharing their suffering and hopes with the people to whom they are sent, they may be transparent witnesses of the mercy of the Father. Prayer intentions were also expressed in favour of people of culture and science, that like the Magi, they may learn to recognize God's signs in creation, and open themselves to the gift of Truth. The celebration ended with the Alma Redemptoris Mater antiphon during which Pope Francis caressed the Marian image and crossed himself. The following is the English text of the Holy Father's homily.

these powerful words of encouragement: "Lift up your eyes and look around" (6o:4). He urges them to lay aside their weariness and complaints, to escape the bottleneck of a narrow way of seeing things, to cast off the dictatorship of the self, the constant temptation to withdraw in to ourselves and our own concerns. To worship the Lord, we first have to "lift up our eyes". In other words, not to let ourselves be imprisoned by those imaginary spectres that stifle hope, not to make our problems and difficulties the centre of our lives. This does not mean denying reality, or deluding ourselves into thinking that all is well. On the contrary, it is a matter of viewing problems and anxieties in a new way, knowing that the Lord is aware of our troubles, attentive to our prayers and not indifferent to the tears we shed. This way of seeing things, which despite everything continues to trust in the Lord, gives rise to filial grati-

tude. When this happens, our hearts become open to worship. On the other hand, when we focus exclusively on problems, and refuse to lift up our eyes to God, fear and confusion creep into our hearts, giving rise to anger, bewilderment, anxiety and depression. Then it becomes difficult to worship the Lord. Once this happens, we need to find the courage to break out of the circle of our foregone conclusions and to recognize that reality is much greater than we imagine. *Lift up your eyes, look around and see*. The Lord asks us first to trust in him, because he truly cares for everyone. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he provide for us? (cf. Lk 12:28). If we lift up our eyes to the Lord, and consider all things in his light, we will see that he never abandons us. The Word became flesh (cf. Jn 1:14) and remains with us always, for all time (cf. Mt 28:20). Always.



When we lift up our eyes to God, life's problems do not go away, no; instead we feel certain that the Lord grants us the strength to deal with them. The first step towards an attitude of worship, then, is to "lift up our eyes". Our worship is that of disciples who have found in God a new and unexpected joy. Worldly joy is based on wealth, success or similar things, always with ourselves at the centre. The joy of Christ's disciples, on the other hand, is based on the fidelity of God, whose promises never fail, whatever the crises we may face. Filial gratitude and joy awaken within us a desire to worship the Lord, who remains ever faithful and never abandons us. The second helpful phrase is *to set out on a journey*. Before they could worship the Child in Bethlehem, the Magi had to undertake a lengthy journey. Matthew tells us that in

Mysteries of Light

MONS. WILLIAM MILLEA

The liturgies of the Christmas season plunge us into the very heart of our Catholic faith. Christian piety, as expressed in our popular traditions, tends to dwell on the poetry and human drama of the Lord's nativity. We set up a Christmas crib in our homes and we retell, especially to our children, the ancient yet ever new story of the Savior's birth in poverty, the message of peace brought by the angels, and the visit of the Magi, who came from the ends of the earth to worship the newborn King. Here in Italy, it is a tradition for families, local artisans and parish churches to create elaborate and artistic nativity scenes. Those from Naples are famous for their scores of figures drawn from everyday life and set against a typically Italian landscape of ancient ruins, lively villages and striking natural beauty. Shepherds guard their flocks, innkeepers serve steaming plates of food, including spaghetti and pizza,



to men playing cards, an open-air market is in full swing, children play, and washerwomen gossip around a public fountain. In a word, the whole scene is one of overwhelming life and activity. Usually the central figures in this drama, Our Lady, Saint Joseph and the baby Jesus are not easy to make out. Amid the bustle of daily life, they remain peacefully apart, alone with the Christ Child, seemingly unaffected by all that is taking place around them. These crib scenes remind us the Son of God was born in hiddenness, while the world went its busy way. We are reminded that, like so many of the figures in the scene, we too can be oblivious to the mystery of grace present and at work in our midst, simply because we are caught up in so many infinitely less important things. We fail to make time, to open our eyes and to see the things that really matter. The Church's liturgy in the Christmas season has little to do with folklore. It dwells not so much on the *story* of Christmas, the colorful events surrounding the birth of the Messiah, as on its ultimate *meaning*, its cosmic significance. We see this already in the Mass of Christmas Day, whose readings center on the majestic prologue of John's Gospel. Saint John, echoing the first words of the Book of Genesis, invites us to contemplate, not the beginning of creation and time, but the eternal begetting of the Son, the Word through whom all things were made. That Word, in the fullness of time, became flesh and dwelt among us, and gave us power to become children of

God, sharers in the Father's glory. One line of the Prologue always struck me, from the time I was a child, when we would hear it each Sunday in what used to be called the Last Gospel. It reads: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it". No one who has glimpsed that light, however dimly, can fail to be moved by this verse. God's light, his eternal life, dwells among us and no darkness in our own lives, or in our human history, can ever overcome it. In a very real way, the three great mysteries that the liturgy commemorates in the days after Christmas are *mysteries of light*. The first is that of Our Lady's divine maternity, celebrated on January 1st, the Octave of Christmas. Among the many threads of which this great feast is woven is the Church's veneration of Mary's virginal conception and her perpetual virginity. Here in the West, the most evocative representations of these mysteries are found in the paintings that show Our Lady kneeling in prayer before her newborn Child, as the light of glory shines all about. With supreme discretion, the artistic tradition alludes to the hidden fulfillment of the prophecy and sign of the Virgin who gives birth. The image of Mary, Virgin and Mother, wrapped in light as she contemplates the Christ Child, is meant to invite us, with union with her, to contemplate the eternal generation of the Son from the Father – light from light, true God from true God – now mirrored in the human birth of her Son in time. And to see in his glory the fullness of light and life that awaits us in heaven, where we hope one day to see him face to face. The second mystery of light celebrated in the Christmas season is, of course, the Epiphany. Here the emphasis of the liturgy is on the star whose light led the Magi, as representatives of the nations, to Christ, the Savior of the world. Saint John tells us that in the mystery of the

Word made flesh, the light which enlightens every man and woman who comes into the world, has shone among us, full of grace and truth. The world was created in that light and can only find salvation by being drawn ever more fully into it. Only in that light can we understand the ultimate meaning of our life, our vocation and our destiny as individuals and as a human family. Epiphany reminds us that the Savior's birth was the beginning of the Church's mission to preach this Good News to people of every nation, race and tongue, until the very end of time. And to spread the Kingdom of justice, holiness and peace that Christ came to bring. The final mystery of light we celebrate in this Christmas season is the Baptism of the Lord, which is itself the first of the five new "luminous mysteries" that Saint John Paul II proposed to enrich our praying of the Rosary. The liturgy of this feast invites us to reflect on the relationship between Christ's consecration of the waters of the Jordan, his anointing by the Holy Spirit, and our own rebirth in baptism. For at our baptism, we were given a share in Christ's divine life and, in him, we were made adoptive children of the Father. In the Church's Liturgy of the Hours for the Baptism of the Lord, we read a homily of Saint Gregory Nazianzen which nicely sums up all that we have been saying about these Christmas mysteries of light. Saint Gregory urges us to relive our own experience of Baptism by plunging with Jesus into the waters and rising with him to see the heavens opened and the glory of God, who takes pleasure in us, his beloved sons and daughters. In that movement upward, in union with the Son of God made man, we come to understand the deepest meaning of Christmas, the mysteries it celebrates, and their significance for our lives and for the redemption of our world.



those days “wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying: ‘Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him’” (*Mt* 2:1-2). A journey always involves a transformation, a change. After a journey, we are no longer the same. There is always something new about those who have made a journey: they have learned new things, encountered new people and situations, and found inner strength amid the hardships and risks they met along the way. No one worships the Lord without first experiencing the interior growth that comes from embarking on a journey.

We become worshippers of the Lord through a gradual process. Experience teaches us, for example, that at fifty we worship differently than we did at thirty. Those who let themselves be shaped by grace usually improve with time: on the outside, we grow older – so Saint Paul tells us – while our inner nature is being renewed each day (cf. *2 Cor* 4:16), as we grow in our understanding of how best to worship the Lord. From this point of view, our failures, crises and mistakes can become learning experiences: often they can help us to be more aware that the Lord alone is worthy of our worship, for only he can satisfy our innermost desire for life and eternity. With the passage of time, life’s trials and difficulties – experienced in faith – help to purify our hearts, making them humbler and thus more and more open to God. Even our sins, the awareness of being sinners, of experiencing such bad things. “But I did this... I did...”: if you approach it with faith and repentance, with contrition, it will help you to grow. Paul says that everything can help us to grow spiritually, to encounter Jesus, even our sins. And Saint Thomas adds: “*etiam mortalitas*”, even the bad sins, the worst. But if you respond with repentance it will help you on this journey towards encountering the Lord and to worship him better.

Like the Magi, we too must allow ourselves to learn from the journey of life, marked by the inevitable inconveniences of travel. We cannot let our weariness, our falls and our failings discourage us. Instead, by humbly acknowledging them, we should make them opportunities to progress towards the Lord Jesus. Life is not about showing off our abilities, but a journey towards the One who loves us. We are not to show off our virtues in every step of our life; rather, with humility we should journey towards the Lord. By keeping our gaze fixed on the Lord, we will find the strength needed to persevere with renewed joy.

And so we come to the third phrase: *to see. To lift up our eyes; to set out on a journey; to see.* The Evangelist tells us that, “going into the house they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him” (*Mt* 2:10-11). Worshiping was an act of homage reserved for sovereigns and high dignitaries. The Magi worshiped the One they knew was the king of the Jews (cf. *Mt* 2:2). But what did they actually see? They saw a poor child and his mother. Yet these wise men from far-off lands were able to look beyond those lowly surroundings and recognize in that Child a royal presence. They were able to “see” beyond appearances. Falling to their knees before the Babe of Bethlehem, they expressed a worship that was above all interior: the opening of the treasures they had brought as gifts symbolized the offering of their own hearts.

To worship the Lord we need to “see” beyond the veil of things visible, which often prove deceptive. Herod and the leading citizens of Jerusalem represent a worldliness enslaved to appearances and immediate attractions. They see, yet they cannot see. It is not that they do not believe, no; it is that they do not know how to see because they are slaves to appearances and seek what is attractive. They value only the sensational, the things that capture the attention of the masses. In the Magi, however, we see a very different approach, one we can define as *theological realism* – a very “high” word, yet helpful – a way of perceiving the objective reality of things and leads to the realization that God shuns all ostentation. The Lord is in humility, he is like that humble child, who shuns that ostentation which is precisely the product of worldliness. A way of “seeing” that transcends the visible and makes it possible for us to worship the Lord who is often hidden in everyday situations, in the poor and those on the fringes. A way of seeing things that is not impressed by sound and fury, but seeks in every situation the things that truly matter, and that seeks the Lord. With Saint Paul, then, let us “look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (*2 Cor* 4:18).

May the Lord Jesus make us true worshippers, capable of showing by our lives his loving plan for all humanity. Let us ask for the grace for each of us and for the whole Church, to learn to worship, to continue to worship, to exercise this prayer of adoration often, because only God is to be adored.

At the Angelus on the Feast of the Epiphany

The light that shines in times of darkness

At the Angelus on Wednesday, 6 January, Solemnity of the Epiphany, Pope Francis highlighted that although “darkness is present and threatening in everyone’s life and in the history of humanity... God’s light is more powerful”. The following is a translation of the Holy Father’s reflection which he shared in Italian from the Private Library of the Vatican’s Apostolic Palace.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, *Buongiorno!*

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany, that is, the manifestation of the Lord to all peoples: in fact, the salvation wrought by Christ knows no boundaries; it is for everyone. The Epiphany is not an additional mystery, it is still the same mystery as the Nativity, viewed, however, from the dimension of light: the light that illumines every man and woman, the light to be *welcomed* in faith and the light to be *brought to others* in charity, through witness, in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Isaiah’s vision, reported in today’s Liturgy (cf. 60:1-6), resounds in our time and is more timely than ever: “darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness the peoples” (cf. v. 2). With this background, the prophet announces the light: the light given by God to Jerusalem and destined to illuminate the path of all the peoples. This light has the power to attract everyone, near and far; everyone sets out on the path to reach it (cf. v. 3). It is a vision that opens the heart, that makes it easier to breathe, that invites hope. Certainly, darkness is present and threatening in everyone’s life and in the history of humanity, but God’s light is more powerful. It is a matter of welcoming it so that it might shine on everyone. But we can ask ourselves: where is this light? The prophet glimpsed it from afar, but that was already enough to fill the heart of Jerusalem with irrepressible joy.

Where is this light? The Evangelist Matthew, in his turn, recounting the episode of the Magi (cf. 2:1-12), shows that this light is

the Babe of Bethlehem; it is Jesus, even if his kingship was not accepted by everyone. Rather some rejected it, like Herod. He is the star who appeared on the horizon, the awaited Messiah, the One through whom God would establish his kingdom of love, his kingdom of justice, his kingdom of peace. He was born not only for some, but for all men and women, for all peoples. The light is for all peoples, salvation is for all peoples.

And how does this “irradiation” happen? How does Christ’s light shine in every place and at all times? It has its own method of disseminating. It does not do so through the powerful means of this world’s empires which always seek to seize power. No, the light of Christ spreads through the proclamation of the Gospel. Proclamation, word, and witness. And with this same “method” chosen by God to come among us: incarnation, that is, by drawing near to the other, encountering the other, assuming the reality of the other and bringing the witness of our faith, each one. This is the only way that the light of Christ, who is Love, can shine in those who welcome it and attract others. Christ’s light does not expand only through words, through phony, commercial methods.... No, no. Faith, word and witness: this is how the light of Christ expands. The star is Christ, but we too can and must be the star for our brothers and our sisters, as witnesses of the treasures of goodness and of infinite mercy which the Redeemer offers freely to everyone. The light of Christ does not expand through proselytism. It expands through witness, through the confession of the faith. Also through martyrdom.

Therefore, the condition is to welcome this light within, to welcome it ever increasingly. Woe if we think we possess it; woe if we think we only need to “manage” it! Like the Magi, we too are called to allow ourselves to be fascinated, attracted, guided, illuminated and converted by Christ: it is the journey of faith, through prayer and the contemplation of the works of God, which continually fill us with joy and wonder, an ever new wonder. That wonder is always the first step to go forward in this light.

Let us invoke the protection of Mary over the universal Church, so that the Gospel of Christ, the light of all peoples, the light of all communities, may spread throughout the entire world.

After the Angelus, the Holy Father continued:

Dear brothers and sisters, I am following with attention and concern the events in the Central African Republic where elections recently took place, through which the people have manifested the desire to pursue the path of peace. I invite all of the parties to a fraternal and respectful dialogue, to reject hatred and to avoid any form of violence.

I warmly address the brothers and sisters of the Oriental Churches, Catholic and Orthodox, who, according to their tradition celebrate the Nativity of the Lord tomorrow. I offer them my most heartfelt wishes for a Holy Christmas in the light of Christ our peace and our hope.

On today’s feast of the Epiphany we celebrate the World Day of Missionary Childhood which involves many children and young people throughout the world. I thank each one of them and I encourage them to be joyful witnesses of Jesus, seeking to always bring fraternity among your peers.

I cordially greet all of you who are linked through various means of communication. A special greeting goes to the “Three Kings Procession” Foundation that organizes events of evangelization and solidarity in numerous cities and villages in Poland and in other nations.

I wish you all a happy Feast Day! Please do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. *Arrivederci.*



SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Holy Mass for World Day of Peace

This will be a good year if we take care of others

Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin celebrated Holy Mass on the Pope's behalf on 1 January, Solemnity of Mary Most Holy, Mother of God, and 54th World Day of Peace. After the proclamation of the Gospel, Cardinal Parolin read aloud the homily Pope Francis had prepared for the occasion. The following is the English text of the homily.

In the readings of today's Mass, three verbs find their fulfilment in the Mother of God: to bless, to be born and to find.

To bless. In the Book of Numbers, the Lord tells his sacred ministers to bless his people: "Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them, 'The Lord bless you'" (6:23-24). This is no pious exhortation; it is a specific request.

Due to a painful bout of sciatica, Pope Francis was unable to preside at year-end Vespers and at the solemn chanting of the 'Te Deum' in Saint Peter's Basilica on 31 December 2020, as well as at the celebrations of Holy Mass for the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God on 1 January.

And it is important that, today too, priests constantly bless the People of God and that the faithful themselves be bearers of blessing; that they bless. The Lord knows how much we need to be blessed. The first thing he did after creating the world was to say that everything was good (*benedicere*) and to say of us that we were very good. Now, however, with the Son of God we receive not only words of blessing, but the blessing itself: Jesus is himself the blessing of the Father. In him, Saint Paul tells us, the Father blesses us "with every blessing" (*Eph* 1:3). Every time we open our hearts to Jesus, God's blessing enters our lives.

Today we celebrate the Son of God, who is "blessed" by nature, who comes to us through his Mother, "blessed" by grace. In this way, Mary brings us God's blessing. Wherever she is, Jesus comes to us. Therefore, we should welcome her like Saint Elizabeth who, immediately recognizing the blessing, cried out: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (*Lk* 1:42). We repeat those words every time we recite the *Hail Mary*. In welcoming Mary, we receive a blessing, but we also learn to bless. Our Lady teaches us that blessings are received in order to be given. She, who was blessed, became a blessing for all those whom she met: for Elizabeth, for the newlyweds at Cana, for the Apostles in the Upper Room... We too are called to bless, to "speak well" in God's name. Our world is gravely polluted by the way we "speak" and think "badly" of others, of society, of ourselves. Speaking badly corrupts and decays, whereas blessing restores life and gives the strength needed to begin anew each day. Let us ask the Mother of God for the grace to be joyful bearers of

God's blessing to others, as she is to us.

The second verb is *to be born*. Saint Paul points out that the Son of God was "born of a woman" (*Gal* 4:4). In these few words, he tells us something amazing: that the Lord was born like us. He did not appear on the scene as an adult, but as a child. He came into the world not on his own, but from a woman, after nine months in the womb of his Mother, from whom he allowed his humanity to be shaped. The heart of the Lord began to beat within Mary; the God of life drew oxygen from her. Ever since then, Mary has united us to God because *in her* God bound himself to our flesh, and he has never left it. Saint Francis

loved to say that Mary "made the Lord of Majesty our brother" (*SAINT BONAVENTURE, Legenda Maior*, 9, 3). She is not only the bridge joining us to God; she is more. She is the road that God travelled in order to reach us, and the road that we must travel in order to reach him. Through Mary, we encounter God the way he wants us to: in tender love, in intimacy, in the flesh.

For Jesus is not an abstract idea; he is real and incarnate; he was "born of a woman", and quietly grew. Women know about this kind of quiet growth. We men tend to be abstract and want things right away. Women are con-

crete and know how to weave life's threads with quiet patience. How many women, how many mothers, thus give birth and rebirth to life, offering the world a future!

We are in this world not to die, but to give life. The holy Mother of God teaches us that the first step in giving life to those around us is to cherish it within ourselves. Today's Gospel tells us that Mary "kept all these things in her heart" (*cf. Lk* 2:19). And goodness comes from the heart. How important it is to keep our hearts pure, to cultivate our interior life and to persevere in our prayer! How important it is to *educate our hearts to care*, to *cherish* the persons and things around us. Everything starts from this: from cherishing others, the world and creation. What good is it to know many persons and things if we fail to cherish them? This year, while we hope for new beginnings and new cures, let us not neglect *care*. Together with a vaccine for our bodies, we need a vaccine for our hearts. That vaccine is care. This will be a good year if we take care of others, as Our Lady does with us.

The third verb is *to find*. The Gospel tells us that the shepherds "found Mary and Joseph and the child" (*v. 16*). They did not find miraculous and spectacular signs, but a simple family. Yet there they truly found God, who is grandeur in littleness, strength in tenderness. But how were the shepherds able to find this inconspicuous sign? They were called by an angel. We too would not have found God if we had not been called by

grace. We could never have imagined such a God, born of a woman, who revolutionizes history with tender love. Yet by grace we did find him. And we discovered that his forgiveness brings new birth, his consolation enkindles hope, his presence bestows irrepressible joy. We found him but we must not lose sight of him. Indeed, the Lord is never found once and for all: each day he has to be found anew. The Gospel thus describes the shepherds as constantly on the lookout, constantly on the move: "they went with haste, they found, they made known, they returned, glorifying and praising God" (*vv. 16-17.20*). They were not passive, because to receive grace we have to be active.

What about ourselves? What are we called to find at the begin-

ning of this year? It would be good to *find time for someone*. Time is a treasure that all of us possess, yet we guard it jealously, since we want to use it only for ourselves. Let us ask for the grace to find time for God and for our neighbour – for those who are alone or suffering, for those who need someone to listen and show concern for them. If we can find time to give, we will be amazed and filled with joy, like the shepherds. May Our Lady, who brought God into the world of time, help us to be generous with our time. Holy Mother of God, to you we consecrate this New Year. You, who know how to cherish things in your heart, care for us, bless our time, and teach us to find time for God and for others. With joy and confidence, we acclaim you: Holy Mother of God! Amen.



First Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy Mother of God

Compassion and solidarity to give some

On Thursday afternoon, 31 December, Cardinal Dean Giovanni Battista Re presided at the celebration of First Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, and the *Te Deum* of thanksgiving for the end of the year in Saint Peter's Basilica. The following is a translation of the homily which was prepared by Pope Francis for the Eucharistic celebration and read aloud in Italian by Cardinal Re.

This evening's celebration always has a two-fold aspect: liturgically, we enter into the solemn Feast of Mary Most Holy, Mother of God; and at the same time, we conclude the solar year with the great hymn of praise.

The first aspect will be addressed in tomorrow morning's homily. This evening, I would like to briefly create the space for *thanksgiving* for the year that is drawing to a close.

"*Te Deum laudamus*", "We praise you, O God: We acclaim you as Lord". It may seem contrived, to thank God at the end of a year like this one, marked by the pandemic. Thoughts turn to families who have lost one or more members, to those who were ill, to those who suffered loneliness, those who lost their jobs....

Sometimes someone asks: what sense does a tragedy such as this have? We do not need to hastily respond to this question. Not even God responds to our most anguished "whys" by resorting to "higher

reason". God's response takes the path of the Incarnation, as the Antiphon for the *Magnificat* will sing shortly: "In his great love for us, God sent his Son in the likeness of our sinful nature".

A God who would sacrifice human beings for his grand design, even the best possible, is certainly not the God that Jesus Christ revealed to us. God is Father, the "eternal Father" and if his Son became man it is because of the immense compassion of the Father's heart. God is Father and shepherd, and what shepherd would give up for lost even a single sheep, thinking that he at least still has many others? No, this cynical and ruthless god does not exist. This is not the God we "praise" and "proclaim as Lord".

When the Good Samaritan met that poor, half-dead man on the roadside, he did not give him a speech to explain the meaning of what had happened to him, perhaps even trying to convince him that in the end it was for his own good. The Samaritan, *moved with compassion*, bent down to that stranger, treating him like a brother and *took care* of him, doing everything in his power (*cf. Lk* 10:25-37).

Yes, perhaps here we can find the "meaning" of this tragedy, of this pandemic, as well as of other scourges that afflict humanity: the triggering of compassion in us and the prompting of atti-

tudes and gestures of closeness, of care, of solidarity, of affection.

This is what happened and is still happening also in Rome, throughout these months. And it is above all for this that we give thanks to God this evening: We give thanks to God for the good things that have taken place in our city during the lockdown and, in general, during the pandemic, which, unfortunately, is not over yet. There are many people who, without making any noise, have tried to make the weight of this trial more bearable. With their daily dedication, inspired by love for their neighbour, they have made the words of the *Te Deum* real: "Day by day we bless you, we praise your name forever". For the blessing and praise that is most pleasing to God is fraternal love.

Healthcare workers – doctors, nurses, volunteers – are on the front lines, and this is why they are always in our prayers and deserve our gratitude, as well as many priests and men and women religious who have done their best with generosity and dedication. But this evening, our thanks is extended to all those who strive every day to support their family in the best way possible and to those who carry out their service for the common good. Let us think of school administrators and teachers, who play an essential role in the life of society and who have to

Vespers and Te Deum



of God and “Te Deum” “meaning” to the pandemic

face a very complex situation. Let us also think with gratitude of public administrators who know how to value all the good resources present in their city and in the territory, who are detached from their own private interests as well as from those of their parties. Why? Because they truly seek everyone’s good, the common good, the good, beginning with the most disadvantaged.

All this cannot happen without grace, without the mercy of God. In difficult moments – we know this by experience – we are inclined to defend ourselves – this is natural – we tend to protect ourselves and our dear ones, to safeguard our own interests.... How is it then that many people find the strength to take care of others without receiving any reward other than doing good? What drives them to give up something of themselves, their own comfort, their own time, their own assets, in order to give them to others? In the end, even if they themselves are not aware of it, they are spurred by God’s strength which is more powerful than our self-

ishness. This is why we give praise to him this evening, because we believe and we know that all the good that is accomplished day after day on earth, in the end, comes from him, it comes from God. And looking toward the future that awaits us, we beg him once again: “May your mercy always be with us, Lord, For we have hoped in you”. Our trust and our hope are in you.



At the Angelus on first day of 2021

A year of peace and hope

Pope Francis calls for an end to violence in Yemen and offers special prayers for the country’s children

As he addressed the faithful from the Private Library of the Vatican’s Apostolic Palace during the Angelus on Friday, 1 January, Pope Francis expressed his wish that 2021 be a “year of fraternal solidarity and peace for all; a year filled with trusting expectation and hope”. The following is a translation of the Holy Father’s reflection, which he offered in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Buongiorno and Happy New Year!

We begin this year by placing ourselves under the maternal and loving gaze of Mary Most Holy, celebrated in today’s liturgy as Mother of God. Thus once again we resume the journey along the paths of history, entrusting our anxieties and our torments to her, who can do everything. Mary looks at us with maternal tenderness just as she used to look at her Son Jesus, and if we look at the Nativity Scene, [he turns towards the Nativity scene in the hall], we see that Jesus is not in the crib, and they tell me that Our Lady said: “Won’t you let me hold this Son of mine in my arms for a bit?”. This is what Our Lady does with us: she wants to hold us in her arms to protect us as she protected and loved her Son. The reassuring and comforting gaze of the Holy Virgin is an encouragement to ensure that this time, granted to us by the Lord, be spent on our human and spiritual growth, that it be a time in which hatred and division – and there are many of them – be resolved, that it be a time to feel more like brothers and sisters, a time to build and not to destroy, to take care of one another and of creation. A time to make things grow, a time of peace.

Care of our neighbour and of cre-

ation is precisely the theme to which the World Day of Peace, which we are celebrating today, is dedicated: *A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace*. The painful events that marked humanity’s journey last year, especially the pandemic, taught us how necessary it is to take an interest in others’ problems and to share their concerns. This attitude represents the path that leads to peace, because it fosters the construction of a society founded on fraternal relationships. Each of us, men and women of this time, is called to make peace happen: each one of us, we are not indifferent to this. We are called to make peace happen each day and in every area of life, taking those brothers and sisters who need a comforting word by the hand, a tender gesture, supportive help. This is a task given to us by God. The Lord has given us the task of being peacemakers.

And peace can be built if we begin to be at peace with ourselves – at peace inside, in our hearts – and with those who are near us, removing the obstacles that prevent us from taking care of those who find themselves in need and in indigence. It means developing a mentality and a culture of “care taking” in order to defeat indifference, to defeat rejection and rivalry – indifference, rejection, rivalry – which unfortunately prevail. To remove these attitudes. And thus, peace is not only the absence of war. Peace is never sterile: no, peace does not exist in a *quirófano* (Spanish for “operating room”). Peace is within life: it is not only the absence of war, but rather a life rich in meaning, rooted in and lived through personal fulfilment and fraternal sharing with others. Then that peace, so longed for and always endangered by violence, by egoism and evil, that peace that is endangered may become possible and achievable if I take it as a task given to me by God.

May the Virgin Mary, who gave birth to the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:6), and who cuddles him this way, with such tenderness in her arms, obtain for us from heaven the precious gift of peace, which cannot be fully pursued by human strength alone. Human strength alone is not enough because peace is above all a gift, a gift of God; it should be implored with unceasing prayer, sustained with patient and respectful dialogue, constructed with an open cooperation with truth and justice and always attentive to the legitimate aspirations of individuals and peoples. My hope is that peace may reign in the hearts of men and women and in families, in places of work and of recreation, in communities and in nations. In families, at work, in nations: peace, peace. Now is the time to think that life today is organized around war, and enmities, by many things that destroy. We want peace. And this is a gift.

On the threshold of this beginning, I extend to everyone my heartfelt greetings for a happy and serene 2021. May each one of us make sure that it be a year of fraternal solidarity and peace for all; a year filled with trusting expectation and hope, which we entrust to the

protection of Mary, Mother of God and our Mother.

After the Angelus, the Holy Father continued:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, to all of you connected through the media, I wish you a peaceful and serene new year. I thank the President of the Italian Republic, the Honourable Sergio Mattarella, for the greetings he addressed to me yesterday evening in his Message for the end of the year, and I cordially reciprocate his greetings.

I am grateful to all those who in every part of the world, while respecting the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, have promoted moments of prayer and reflection on the occasion of today’s World Day of Peace. I think in particular of yesterday evening’s virtual march organized by the Italian episcopate, Pax Christi, Caritas and Catholic Action, as well as the one from this morning organized by Sant’Egidio, being broadcast by streaming worldwide. I thank everyone for these and the many other initiatives in favour of reconciliation and harmony among peoples.

In this context, I express sadness and concern for the latest escalation of vio-



lence in Yemen that is causing numerous innocent victims, and I pray so that efforts will be made to find solutions that allow peace to return to that tormented population. Brothers and sisters, let us think of the children in Yemen! Without education, without medicine, hungry. Let us pray together for Yemen.

In addition, I invite you to join the Archdiocese of Owerri in Nigeria in prayer for Bishop Moses Chikwe and his chauffeur who were kidnapped in recent days. Let us ask the Lord that they and all those who are victims of similar actions in Nigeria may return to freedom unharmed and that that beloved country may regain security, harmony and peace.

I offer a special greeting to the *Sternsinger*, the “Star Singers”, children and young people in Germany and Austria, who despite being unable to visit families in their homes, found a way to bring their joyful Christmas message to them, and to collect donations for their peers in need.

I wish everyone a year of peace and hope, under the protection of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. And please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. *Arrivederci!*

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Catechesis on prayer

Gratitude makes the world a better place

As he continued his series of catecheses on prayer at the General Audience on Wednesday morning, 30 December, Pope Francis reflected on the importance of giving thanks to transmit the hope that the world needs. The following is a translation of the Holy Father's words, which he offered in Italian from the Private Library of the Vatican's Apostolic Palace.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Buongiorno!

Today, I would like to focus on the prayer of thanksgiving. And I take my cue from an episode recounted by the Evangelist Luke. While Jesus was on the way, 10 lepers approached him, begging: "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" (17:13). We know that those who had leprosy suffered not only physically, but also from social marginalization and religious marginalization. Jesus did not back off from meeting them. Sometimes, he went beyond the limitations imposed by the law and touched the sick – which was not permitted – he embraced and healed them. In this case, there was no contact. From a distance, Jesus invited them to present themselves to the priests (v. 14), who were designated by law to certify any healings that had occurred. Jesus said nothing else. He listened to their prayer, he heard their cry for mercy, and he sent them immediately to the priests.

Those 10 lepers trusted, they did not remain there until they were cured, no: they trusted and they went immediately, and while they were on their way, all 10 of them were cured. The priests would have therefore been able to verify their healing and readmit them to normal life. But here is the most important point: only one in the group, before going to the priests, returned to thank Jesus and to praise God for the grace received. Only one, the other nine continued on their way. And Jesus points out that that man was a Samaritan, a sort of "heretic" for the Jews of that time. Jesus comments: "Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (17:18). This narrative is touching.

This narrative, so to speak, divides the world in two: those who do not give thanks and those who do; those who take everything as if it is owed them, and those who welcome everything as a gift, as grace. The *Catechism* says: "every event and need can become an offering of thanksgiving" (n. 2638). The prayer of thanksgiving always begins from here: from the recognition that grace precedes us. We were thought of before we learned how to think; we were loved before we learned how to love; we were desired be-

fore our hearts conceived a desire. If we view life like this, then "thank you" becomes the driving force of our day. And how often we even forget to say "thank you".

For us Christians, thanksgiving was the name given to the most essential Sacrament there is: the *Eucharist*. In fact, the Greek word means precisely this: *thanksgiving*. Eucharist: thanksgiving. Christians, as all believers, bless God for the gift of life. To live is above all to have received life. All of us are born because someone wanted us to have life. And this is only the first of a long series of debts that we incur by living. Debts of gratitude. During our lives, more than one person has

gazed on us with pure eyes, gratuitously. Often, these people are educators, catechists, persons who carried out their roles above and beyond what was required of them. And they stirred gratitude within us. Even friendship is a gift for which we should always be grateful.

This "thank you" that we must say continually, this thanks that Christians share with everyone, grows in the encounter with Jesus. The Gospels attest that when Jesus passed by, he often stirred joy and praise to God in those who met him. The Gospel accounts of Christmas are filled with prayerful people whose hearts are greatly moved by the coming of the Saviour.



bit of hope. Everything is united and everything is connected, and each one can do their part wherever they are. The path to happiness is the one that Saint Paul described at the end of one of his letters: "Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit" (1Thess 5:17-19). Do not quench the Spirit, what a beautiful project of life! Not quenching the Spirit that we have within leads us to gratitude.

APPEAL

Yesterday, an earthquake in Croatia caused victims and serious damage. I express my closeness to the wounded and to those who have been affected by the earthquake and I pray in particular for those who have lost their lives and for their families. I hope that the country's leaders, helped by the international community, may be able to quickly alleviate the suffering of the dear Croatian people.

SPECIAL GREETINGS

I cordially greet the English-speaking faithful. May each of you, and your families, cherish the joy of this Christmas season and draw near in prayer to the Saviour who has come to dwell among us. God bless you!

Lastly, as usual my thoughts turn to the elderly, to young people, to the sick and to newlyweds. Live the New Year as a precious gift, committing yourselves to building your lives in the light of the truth that the Word made flesh came to bring to the world.



VATICAN BULLETIN

AUDIENCES 2020

Monday, 21 December

Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints

Wednesday, 23 December

Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani Thorne, Archbishop emeritus of Lima

CHANGES IN EPISCOPATE 2020

The Holy Father appointed as Bishop of Greensburg, USA, Msgr Larry J. Kulick. Until now he has served as diocesan administrator and parish priest of Saint James Parish in New Alexandria (18 Dec.).

Bishop-elect Kulick, 54, was born in Natrona Heights, USA. He holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy, a master's in theology, and a licence in Canon Law. He was ordained a priest on 16 May 1992.

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Pietro Lagnese as Bishop of Caserta, Italy. Until now he has served as Bishop of Ischia, Italy (19 Dec.).

Bishop Lagnese, 59, was born in Vitulazio, Italy. He was ordained a priest on 1 May 1986. He was ordained a bishop on 1 May 2013, subsequent to his appointment as Bishop of Ischia.

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Miguel Fernando González Mariño as Bishop of Espinal, Colombia. Until now he has served as titular Bishop of

Boseta and Auxiliary of the Archdiocese of Ibagué, Colombia (19 Dec.).

Bishop González Mariño, 54, was born in Tunja, Colombia. He was ordained a priest on 1 August 1998. He was ordained a bishop on 12 March 2016, subsequent to his appointment as titular Bishop of Boseta and Auxiliary of Ibagué.

The Holy Father appointed as Auxiliary Bishop of San Isidro, Argentina, Father Raúl Pizarro, assigning him the titular episcopal See of Ausana. Until now he has served as parish priest of Santa Rita (19 Dec.).

Bishop-elect Pizarro, 47, was born in San Isidro, Argentina. He was ordained a priest on 23 October 1998.

The Holy Father appointed as Bishop of Kotor, Montenegro, Fr Ivan Štironja. Until now he has served as parish priest of Studenci and rector of the diocesan Shrine of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Mostar-Duvno, Bosnia and Herzegovina (22 Dec.).

Bishop-elect Štironja, 60, was born in Pješivac, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was ordained a priest on 29 June 1986. He studied liturgy.

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Santiago Jaime Silva Retamales as Bishop of Valdivia, Chile. Until now he has served as Military Ordinary for Chile (23 Dec.).

Bishop Silva Retamales, 65, was born in La Calera, Chile. He was ordained a priest on 24 October 1980. He was ordained a bishop on 6 April 2002, subsequent to his appointment as titular Bishop of Bela and Auxiliary

of Valparaíso. On 7 July 2015 he was appointed Military Ordinary of Chile.

The Holy Father appointed as Auxiliary Bishops of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Belo Horizonte, Brazil the following (23 Dec.):

– Fr Júlio César Gomes Moreira, assigning him the titular episcopal See of Tisiduo. Until now he has served as parish priest of Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Fátima in Sobradinho, DF, Brazil.

Bishop-elect Gomes Moreira, 48, was born in Fortaleza, Brazil. He was ordained a priest on 6 December 2003. He studied philosophy and theology. He attended a course in psychology.

– Fr Nivaldo dos Santos Ferreira, assigning him the titular episcopal See of Tiava. Until now he has served as rector of the Archdiocesan Shrine of São Judas Tadeu in Belo Horizonte.

Bishop-elect dos Santos Ferreira, 53, was born in Barbacena, Brazil. He was ordained a priest on 18 May 1996. He studied philosophy and theology. He later obtained a licence in theology.

The Holy Father appointed Bishop Victor Lyngdoh as Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Shillong, India. Until now he has served as Bishop of Jowai, India (28 Dec.).

Archbishop Lyngdoh, 64, was born in Wahlang, India. He was ordained a priest on 25 January 1987. He was or-



daind a bishop on 2 April 2006, subsequent to his appointment as Bishop of Nongstoin, India. On 15 October 2016 he was appointed Bishop of Jowai.

The Holy Father appointed as Bishop of Bridgetown, Barbados, Fr Neil Sebastian Scantlebury. Until now he has served as chancellor of the same diocese and parish priest of Saint Ann Parish, in the island of Saint Croix (28 Dec.).

Bishop-elect Scantlebury, 55, was born in Barbados. He was ordained a priest on 18 May 1995. He holds a degree in mechanical engineering and a Master of Arts in Sacred Scripture. The Holy Father appointed as Bishop of the Diocese of Malindi, Kenya, Fr Wilybard Lagho. Until now he has served as vicar general of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Mombasa (28 Dec.).

Bishop-elect Lagho, 62, was born in Taita-Taveta, Kenya. He was ordained a priest on 25 April 1987. He studied philosophy and theology.

ANGELUS

Pope renews his call to dedicate 2021 to the care of our neighbours and of creation

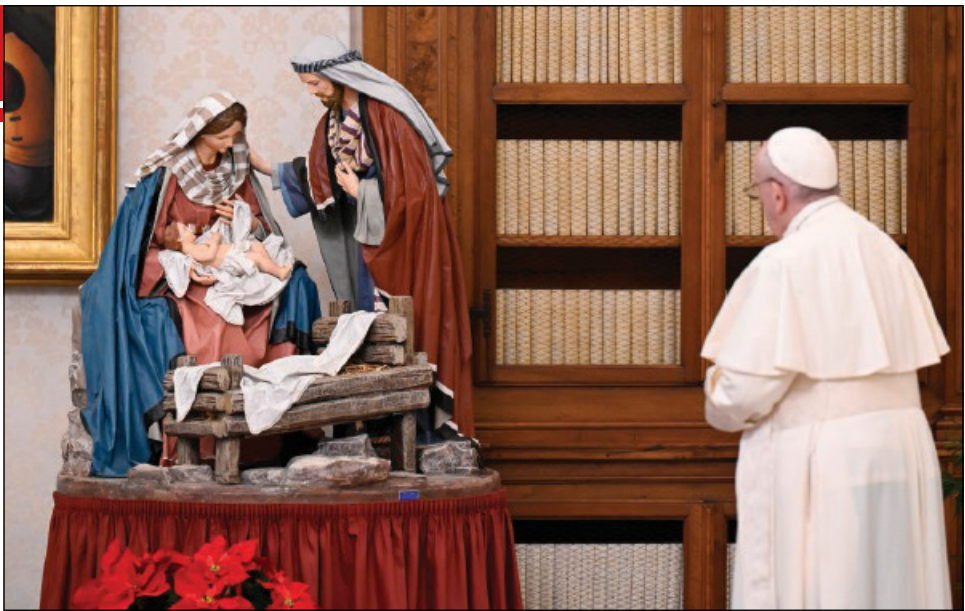
God made himself fragile to touch our fragility

At the Angelus on Sunday, 3 January, reflecting on the day's passage from the Gospel of John, Pope Francis highlighted the boldness of God's decision to become flesh in order to show us that he loves us precisely in our frailties. The following is a translation of the Holy Father's words, which he shared in Italian from the Private Library of the Vatican's Apostolic Palace.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Buongiorno,
On this second Sunday after Christmas, the Word of God does not offer us an episode from the life of Jesus, but rather it tells us about him before he was born. It takes us back to reveal something about Jesus before he came among us. It does so especially in the prologue of the Gospel of John, which begins: "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn 1:1). *In the beginning*: are the first words of the Bible, the same words with which the creation account begins: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). Today, the Gospel says that Jesus, the One we contemplated in his Nativity, as an infant, existed before: before things began, before the universe, before everything. He existed before space and time. "In him was life" (Jn 1:4), before life appeared.
Saint John calls Him the *Verbum*, that is, the *Word*. What does he mean by this? The word is used to communicate: one does not speak alone, one speaks to someone. One always

speaks to someone. When we are in the street and we see people who talk to themselves, we say, "This person, something has happened to him...". No, we always speak to someone. Now, the fact that Jesus was the Word from the very beginning means that from the beginning God wants to communicate with us. He wants to talk to us. The only-begotten Son of the Father (cf. v.14) wants to tell us about the beauty of being children of God; He is "the true light" (v. 9) and wants to keep us distant from the darkness of evil; He is "the life" (v. 4), who knows our lives and wants to tell us that he has always loved them. He loves us all. Here is today's wondrous message: Jesus is the Word, the eternal Word of God, who has always thought of us and wanted to communicate with us.
And to do so, he went beyond words. In fact, at the heart of today's Gospel we are told that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14). The Word became *flesh*: why does Saint John use this expression "flesh"? Could he not have said, in a more elegant way, that the Word was made *man*? No, he uses the word *flesh* because it indicates our human condition in all its weakness, in all its frailty. He tells us that God became fragile so he could touch our fragility up close. Thus, from the moment the Lord became flesh, nothing about our life is extraneous to him. There is nothing that he scorns, we can share

everything with him, everything. Dear brother, dear sister, God became flesh to tell us, to tell you that he loves you right there, that he loves us right there, in our frailties, in your frailties; right there, where we are most ashamed, where you are most ashamed. This is bold, God's decision is bold: He became flesh precisely where very often we are ashamed; He enters into our shame, to become our brother, to share the path of life.
He became flesh and never turned back. He did not put on our humanity like a garment that can be put on and taken off. No, he never detached himself from our flesh. And he will never be separated from it: now and forever he is in heaven with his body made of human flesh. He has united himself forever to our humanity; we might say that he "espoused" himself to it. I like to think that when the Lord prays to the Father for us, he does not merely speak: he shows him the wounds of the flesh, he shows him the wounds he suffered for us. This is Jesus: with his flesh he is the intercessor, he wanted to bear even the signs of suffering. Jesus, with his flesh, is before the Father. Indeed, the Gospel says that *He came to dwell among us*. He did not come to visit us, and then leave; He came to dwell with us, to stay with us. What, then, does he desire from us? He desires a great intimacy. He wants us to share with him our joys and sufferings, de-



sires and fears, hopes and sorrows, people and situations. Let us do this, with confidence: let us open our hearts to him, let us tell him everything. Let us pause in silence before the Nativity scene to savour the tenderness of God who became near, who became flesh. And without fear, let us invite him among us, into our homes, into our families. And also – everyone knows this well – let us invite him into our frailties. Let us invite him, so that he may see our wounds. He will come and life will change.

After the Angelus, the Holy Father continued:

Dear brothers and sisters, I renew to you all my wishes for the year that has just begun. As Christians, we tend to shun the mentality of fatalism or magic. We know that things will improve to the extent that, with God's help, we will work together for the common good, placing the weakest and most disadvantaged at the centre. We do not know what 2021 holds for us, but what each one of us, and all of us together, can do is to try a little harder to take care of one another and of creation, our common home.
It is true, there is the temptation to take care only of our own interests, to

continue to wage war, for example, concentrating only on the economic aspect, to live hedonistically, that is, seeking only to satisfy our own pleasure ... there is that temptation. I read something in the newspapers that rather saddened me: in one country, I forget which, more than 40 aircraft took off to allow people to escape the lockdown and to enjoy the holidays. But those people, who are good people, did they not think about those who stayed at home, about the economic problems faced by many people who have been laid low by the lockdown, about the sick? They thought only about taking a holiday for their own pleasure. This pained me greatly.
I offer a special greeting to those who begin the new year with greater difficulties, the sick, the unemployed, to those who live situations of oppression or exploitation. And with affection I wish to greet all families, especially those in which there are young children or which are expecting a birth. A birth is always a promise of hope. I am close to these families: may the Lord bless you!
I wish you all a happy Sunday, always thinking of Jesus who became flesh precisely to dwell with us, in the good things and the bad, always. Please, do not forget to pray for me. Enjoy your lunch. *Arrivederci!*

A change of stride

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

it is the propitious time for change, for conversion. A change of stride; this is what is needed to cross the threshold of an unprecedented time that holds the promise of a new light. Only by changing stride, one's usual way of walking, can one see the world from another perspective. Those who insist on walking as they did before will remain rigid with *rigor mortis*. However, those who recognize that a crisis has come – and, by throwing everything into disarray, has marked us all without distinction – will live.
There is a "warning light" that signals whether this transition has truly taken place in depth or was only an emotional and superficial fact, and this detail too flows from the biblical episode: the "warning light" is our relationship with our brothers and sisters. Jacob is there, alone, at the ford of the river, in the anguish of the imminent encounter with his dreaded brother Esau. Only after encountering/struggling with God will he be able to embrace and reconcile with his brother. It is the path that Pope Francis points out to us with the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, which he had envisioned before, but finished writing during the pandemic: at the time of crisis, the way out is to ask God for the strength to open ourselves up to others, to take care of our brothers and sisters by breaking the chains of victimhood and narcissism. We will be healed if we take care of others. Before us there is a ford to be crossed, and it can be done, but only if we are ready for this painful and essential change of stride.

A.M.



VATICAN BULLETIN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

The Holy Father accepted the resignation presented by Bishop Gerald Richard Barnes from the pastoral care of the Diocese of San Bernardino, USA. He is succeeded by Bishop Alberto Rojas, coadjutor Bishop of the same Diocese (28 Dec.).
Bishop Rojas, 55, was born in El Zapote de la Labor, Mexico. He was ordained a priest on 24 May 1997. He was ordained a bishop on 10 August 2011, subsequent to his appointment as Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, USA, and titular Bishop of Marazanae. On 2 December 2019 he was appointed coadjutor Bishop of San Bernardino.
The Holy Father accepted the resignation presented by Bishop Carmelo Cuttitta from the pastoral care of the Diocese of Ragusa, Italy (28 Dec.).
The Holy Father accepted the resignation presented by Bishop Marc Stenger from the pastoral care of the Diocese of Troyes, France (28 Dec.).

The Holy Father accepted the resignation presented by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin from the pastoral care of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Dublin, Ireland (29 Dec.).
The Holy Father appointed Bishop Dermot Pius Farrell, as Metropolitan Archbishop of Dublin. Until now he has served as Bishop of Ossory, Ireland (29 Dec.).
Archbishop Farrell, 66, was born in Castletown-Geoghegan, Ireland. He was ordained a priest on 7 June 1980. He was ordained a bishop on 11 March 2018, subsequent to his appointment as Bishop of Ossory.
The Holy Father accepted the resignation presented by Bishop Telesphor Mkude from the pastoral care of the Diocese of Morogoro, Tanzania (30 Dec.).
The Holy Father accepted the resignation presented by Archbishop Thomas E. Gullickson, titular of Bomarzo, from the office of Apostolic Nuncio of Switzerland and Liechtenstein (31 Dec.).

APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR

The Holy Father appointed as Apostolic Administrator *sede vacante* of the apostolic vicariate of Istanbul and the exarchate for faithful of Byzantine rite resident in Turkey, Archbishop Lorenzo Piretto, OP, Archbishop emeritus of Izmir and Apostolic Administrator of the same circumscription (24 Dec.).

NECROLOGY

Bishop Uriah Adolphus Ashley Maclean, titular Bishop of Agbia and Auxiliary Bishop emeritus of Panamá, first Bishop of Penonomé, Panama, at age 76 (25 Nov.).
Archbishop Bonifácio Piccini, SDB, Archbishop emeritus of Cuiabá, Brazil, at age 91 (28 Nov.).
Bishop José Rafael Barquero Arce, Bishop emeritus of Alajuela, Costa Rica, at age 89 (29 Nov.).
Archbishop Henri Teissier,

Archbishop emeritus of Algiers, Algeria, at age 91 (1 Dec.).
Bishop Stephen Tjephe of Loikaw, Myanmar, at age 65 (16 Dec.).
Bishop Jacó Roberto Hilgert, Bishop emeritus of Cruz Alta, Brazil, at age 94 (17 Dec.).
Archbishop Peter Takeo Okada, Archbishop emeritus of Tokyo, Japan, at age 79 (18 Dec.).
Bishop Mile Bogović, Bishop emeritus of Gospić-Senj, Croatia, at age 81 (19 Dec.).
Bishop Antonio Vacca, Bishop emeritus of Alghero-Bosa, Italy, at age 86 (22 Dec.).
Bishop Sergio Pintor, Bishop emeritus of Ozieri, Italy, at age 83 (26 Dec.).
Bishop Paul Sueo Hamaguchi of Oita, Japan, at age 72 (28 Dec.).
Bishop Gregory Obinna Ochiagha, Bishop emeritus of Orlu, Nigeria, at age 89 (29 Dec.).
Bishop Geoffrey James Robinson, Auxiliary Bishop emeritus of Sydney, Australia, titular Bishop of Rusuca, at age 83 (29 Dec.).

Fratelli Tutti

AGBONKHIANMEGHE E. OROBATOR SJ

“*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*.” This saying exists in variant forms in Southern Africa’s bantu languages and translates as “A person is a person through other persons” or “I am because we are.”

Strikingly, Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* contains an equivalent: “Each of us is fully a person when we are part of a people; at the same time, there are no peoples without respect for the individuality of each person” (Paragraph 182). In other words, we are “brothers and sisters all” (8).

Francis credits South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, among others, as an inspiration for his encyclical (286). Tutu is the main proponent of Ubuntu, an African humanist philosophy based on a culture of sharing, openness, mutual dependence, dialogue, and interpersonal encounter. In Ubuntu, human existence reaches fulfilment as part of whole, society thrives on a common humanity, and forgiveness and reconciliation are prerequisites for preserving social harmony.

Francis’ twin ideas of fraternity and social friendship underscore the urgency of Ubuntu in our present-day context, where the fabric of humanity is riven by atavistic conflicts, ideological division, isolationist paranoia, and political polarization that take a catastrophic toll on the weak and vulnerable (18-19).

Devoid of a common uniting horizon, our ancestral fear of others drives us to build walls (26-27, 37, 41), thereby weakening our belonging to a common family and eviscerating our dream of a common purpose (30). Yet we are in this together

If “I am because we are,” then true fraternity leaves no one behind, because we are saved together and are responsible for the life of all

(35); hence the imperative of building a community of solidarity and belonging.

“Mountains don’t meet, but people do,” says a Swahili proverb. A foundational premise of Ubuntu recognizes the centrality of encounter with the other. For Francis, fraternity rests on a culture of authentic encounters whose precondition is creative openness to the other (50).

Mutual openness, sadly, is assailed by a toxic digital communication saturated in social aggression, verbal violence, and ideological myopia. The result is a virtual closed circuit connected by shared fear and hatred for the other (42-46).

Francis proposes a new path toward a culture of fraternity founded on an “encounter of mercy” (83). Drawing on the parable of the Good Samaritan, he underscores the responsibility of love for others based on our shared Ubuntu. Such love builds a universal fraternity beyond considerations of its recipients’ status, gender, origin, or location (107, 121).

Universal fraternity entails suffering and requires time (48, 63) to forge a new social bond of solidarity that tends the vulnerability and



‘Fratelli Tutti’ and the African philosophical and political tradition of ubuntu

fragility of others (66-69, 115). Francis likens this community to a polyhedral reality composed, not of isolated monads (111, 143-5), but as “a family that is stronger than the sum of small individual members” (78).

This reality exemplifies Ubuntu par excellence, because it is cemented by an inclusive social love that transcends narrow barriers, interests, and prejudices (83).

For Francis, the radical mutuality of Ubuntu is achievable through love without borders that transforms humanity into a community of neighbors without borders. Like Ubuntu philosophy, Francis argues for a social premium on rights and duties on account of the relationality of humanity, whose deepest manifestation is the ability to transcend the self and create a solidarity of service of others (87, 88, 111).

Francis’ social love goes beyond the immediacy of neighborliness; it is expansive and enriches the lives and existence of others. This kind of love manifests as hospitality, because it welcomes and values others for who they are (90-93), recognizes every human person as an “existential forerunner” with an incontrovertible moral claim on our care (97).

This expansive love forms the basis of an inclusive social friendship and borderless fraternity (94, 99). Far from being a levelling of difference or “false universalism” devoid of diversity (100), or worse a closed group of like-minded “associates,” fraternity, together with liberty and equality, offer a strong antidote to the virus of individualism (105).

If “I am because we are,” then true fraternity leaves no one behind (108), because we

are saved together and are responsible for the life of all (137).

“If my neighbor’s house is on fire, I cannot sleep peacefully,” says another African proverb. In the spirit of Ubuntu, genuine fraternity eschews a “local narcissism” that constricts the mind and heart (146, 147). Authentic fraternity creates a family of nations, based on hospitality and gratuitousness (139, 141); it recognizes the rights of all peoples, communities, groups in private and social spheres (118, 124, 126).

In Francis’s moral vision, the litmus test of the authenticity of fraternity is whether it welcomes, protects, promotes, and integrates migrants, who come, not as nuisance or burden, but as gift and blessing (129, 133).

Fratelli Tutti highlights several features of politics that apply to Africa, where the current predominant models of political engagement fall short of Pope Francis’ ideal of politics as a vocation of charity.

Consider, for example, various pathologies of politics and economics across the globe today, such as populism, nationalism, liberalism and neoliberalism. Between the short-sightedness of populism, the reductionism of liberalism of society

to the sum of individual interests (163) and the market hegemony of neoliberalism (168), the cost and casualties of our present political and economic arrangement are incalculable.

In 2009, the second African Synod stated categorically that “Africa needs saints in high political office: saintly politicians....” The Synod reserved unflattering words for Catholic politicians who fall short of this ideal. It said: “Many Catholics in high office have fallen woefully short in their performance in office. The Synod calls on such people to repent, or quit the public arena and stop causing havoc to the people and giving the Catholic Church a bad name.”

Pope Francis could have used the same words in *Fratelli Tutti*. For many people, politics resembles a “dirty game.” Even the word itself is “distasteful,” says Pope Francis (176), for many reasons.

Firstly, currently politics serves the needs and interests of elites and privileged classes and it excludes the poor and vulnerable (155). Secondly, politics eviscerates the word “people” of its meaning (157, 160). As in Ubuntu, “People,” Francis tell us, has a deeper and mystical meaning: dynamic, open-ended, diverse and open to difference – “people” isn’t just a transactional or logical category (158, 160, 163). Thirdly, politics has become a means for appropriating public resources and the perpetuation of autocrats in positions of power. This kind of political predation morphs into violence when selfishness or “concupiscence” becomes the overriding principle. In other words, politics becomes a concern “only with myself, my group, my own petty interests” (166) and people become expedient and expendable objects in the rabid pursuit of power.

Pope Francis affirms that we need new models of politics in the world. We need politics with a heart; a healthy politics – “a better kind of politics” (154, 177, 179). The model that Francis proposes offers a new and different option founded on charity (180, 186).

Politics that is animated by charity or political charity serves the common good not individual interests (180); works to provide a dignified life for all citizens through work (162); seeks “ways of building communities at every level of social life” (182); offers concrete solutions to pressing needs (183-4); eliminates social conditions that cause suffering (186); shows preferential option for “those in greatest need” (187); addresses anything that threatens or violates fundamental human rights (188); eliminates hunger and poverty (189, 172); stops the trafficking in human beings (190); and defends fundamental human rights (172).

This is neither empty rhetoric or utopian (190). It could become a reality in Africa and in the world if politics were conducted by people who love, not those who merely lust for power (193, 195) – in other words, people whom the African Synod calls “saintly politicians.” These kinds of politicians do not sacrifice people for personal interest and gains, but “make room for everyone,” create a world where “everyone has a place” (190) and people are recognised as “brothers and sisters.”

In this context, universal fraternity and social friendship connect the local and the global in a mutually beneficial relationship (142). Cultural rootedness presumes openness to an encounter with the other, either as peoples, cultures, or countries. Cultural hospitality engenders communion and mutual dependence of nations (146-9).

Besides encounter, another synonym of Ubuntu is dialogue. Dialogue promotes social friendship, because it respects the difference of opinions and points of view. Dialogue is open to others, recognizes our shared belonging, and is animated by the common pursuit of truth, the common good and service of the poor (205, 230). On it rests the possibility of peace based on truth (228).

This culture of dialogue and encounter transcends differences and divisions; yet it is inclusive of all and offers news possibilities and processes of lifestyle, social organization, and encounter (215-217; 231). As a form of kindness, social friendship makes a preference of love for the poor, vulnerable, and the least (224, 233, 235).

As mentioned, Ubuntu prioritizes forgiveness and reconciliation, especially when wrongdoing has sundered social harmony. Francis agrees: social friendship values forgiveness and reconciliation, not as mechanisms for forgetting or condoning injustice and oppression, but as means of resolving conflict through dialogue (241, 244, 246, 251). As Tutu says, the pursuit of justice has “no future without forgiveness.” (cf. 250, 252).

In every way, *Fratelli Tutti* aligns with the values and principles of Ubuntu.

Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator is a Jesuit priest, theologian, and president of the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar.

