



## Message of the Holy Father Francis for the 58th World Day of Peace (1 January 2025), 12.12.2024

***Forgive us our trespasses: grant us your peace***

### *I. Listening to the plea of an endangered humanity*

1. At the dawn of this New Year given to us by our heavenly Father, a year of Jubilee in the spirit of hope, I offer heartfelt good wishes of peace to every man and woman. I think especially of those who feel downtrodden, burdened by their past mistakes, oppressed by the judgment of others and incapable of perceiving even a glimmer of hope for their own lives. Upon everyone I invoke hope and peace, for this is a Year of Grace born of the Heart of the Redeemer!

2. Throughout this year, the Catholic Church celebrates the Jubilee, an event that fills hearts with hope. The “jubilee” recalls an ancient Jewish practice, when, every forty-ninth year, the sound of a ram’s horn (in Hebrew, *jobel*) would proclaim a year of forgiveness and freedom for the entire people (cf. *Lev 25:10*). This solemn proclamation was meant to echo throughout the land (cf. *Lev 25:9*) and to restore God’s justice in every aspect of life: in the use of the land, in the possession of goods and in relationships with others, above all the poor and the dispossessed. The blowing of the horn reminded the entire people, rich and poor alike, that no one comes into this world doomed to oppression: all of us are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same Father, born to live in freedom, in accordance with the Lord’s will (cf. *Lev 25:17, 25, 43, 46, 55*).

3. In our day too, the Jubilee is an event that inspires us to seek to establish the liberating justice of God in our world. In place of the ram’s horn, at the start of this Year of Grace we wish to hear the “desperate plea for help”<sup>[1]</sup> that, like the cry of the blood of Abel (cf. *Gen 4:10*), rises up from so many parts of our world – a plea that God never fails to hear. We for our part feel bound to cry out and denounce the many situations in which the earth is exploited and our neighbors oppressed.<sup>[2]</sup> These injustices can appear at times in the form of what Saint John Paul II called “structures of sin”,<sup>[3]</sup> that arise not only from injustice on the part of some but are also consolidated and maintained by a network of complicity.

4. Each of us must feel in some way responsible for the devastation to which the earth, our common home, has been subjected, beginning with those actions that, albeit only indirectly, fuel the conflicts that presently plague our human family. Systemic challenges, distinct yet interconnected, are thus created and together cause havoc in our world.<sup>[4]</sup> I think, in particular, of all manner of disparities, the inhuman treatment meted out to migrants, environmental decay, the confusion willfully created by disinformation, the refusal to engage in any form of dialogue and the immense resources spent on the industry of war. All these, taken together, represent a threat to the existence of humanity as a whole. At the beginning of this year, then, we desire to heed the plea of suffering humankind in order to feel called, together and as individuals, to break the bonds of injustice and to proclaim God’s justice. Sporadic acts of philanthropy are not enough. Cultural and structural changes are necessary, so that enduring change may come about.<sup>[5]</sup>

## II. *A cultural change: all of us are debtors*

5. The celebration of the Jubilee spurs us to make a number of changes in order to confront the present state of injustice and inequality by reminding ourselves that the goods of the earth are meant not for a privileged few, but for everyone.<sup>[6]</sup> We do well to recall the words of Saint Basil of Caesarea: "Tell me, what things belong to you? Where did you find them to make them part of your life? ... Did you not come forth naked from the womb of your mother? Will you not return naked to the ground? Where did your property come from? If you say that it comes to you naturally by luck, you would deny God by not recognizing the Creator and being grateful to the Giver".<sup>[7]</sup> Without gratitude, we are unable to recognize God's gifts. Yet in his infinite mercy the Lord does not abandon sinful humanity, but instead reaffirms his *gift* of life by the saving *forgiveness* offered to all through Jesus Christ. That is why, in teaching us the "Our Father", Jesus told us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses" (*Mt 6:12*).

6. Once we lose sight of our relationship to the Father, we begin to cherish the illusion that our relationships with others can be governed by a logic of exploitation and oppression, where might makes right.<sup>[8]</sup> Like the elites at the time of Jesus, who profited from the suffering of the poor, so today, in our interconnected global village,<sup>[9]</sup> the international system, unless it is inspired by a spirit of solidarity and interdependence, gives rise to injustices, aggravated by corruption, which leave the poorer countries trapped. A mentality that exploits the indebted can serve as a shorthand description of the present "debt crisis" that weighs upon a number of countries, above all in the global South.

7. I have repeatedly stated that foreign debt has become a means of control whereby certain governments and private financial institutions of the richer countries unscrupulously and indiscriminately exploit the human and natural resources of poorer countries, simply to satisfy the demands of their own markets.<sup>[10]</sup> In addition, different peoples, already burdened by international debt, find themselves also forced to bear the burden of the "ecological debt" incurred by the more developed countries.<sup>[11]</sup> Foreign debt and ecological debt are two sides of the same coin, namely the mindset of exploitation that has culminated in the debt crisis.<sup>[12]</sup> In the spirit of this Jubilee Year, I urge the international community to work towards forgiving foreign debt in recognition of the ecological debt existing between the North and the South of this world. This is an appeal for solidarity, but above all for justice.<sup>[13]</sup>

8. The cultural and structural change needed to surmount this crisis will come about when we finally recognize that we are all sons and daughters of the one Father, that we are all in his debt but also that we need one another, in a spirit of shared and diversified responsibility. We will be able to "rediscover once for all that we need one another" and are indebted one to another.<sup>[14]</sup>

## III. *A journey of hope: three proposals*

9. If we take to heart these much-needed changes, the Jubilee Year of Grace can serve to set each of us on a renewed journey of hope, born of the experience of God's unlimited mercy.<sup>[15]</sup>

God owes nothing to anyone, yet he constantly bestows his grace and mercy upon all. As Isaac of Nineveh, a seventh-century Father of the Eastern Church, put it in one of his prayers: "Your love, Lord, is greater than my trespasses. The waves of the sea are nothing with respect to the multitude of my sins, but placed on a scale and weighed against your love, they vanish like a

speck of dust”.<sup>[16]</sup> God does not weigh up the evils we commit; rather, he is immensely “rich in mercy, for the great love with which he loved us” (*Eph 2:4*). Yet he also hears the plea of the poor and the cry of the earth. We would do well simply to stop for a moment, at the beginning of this year, to think of the mercy with which he constantly forgives our sins and forgives our every debt, so that our hearts may overflow with hope and peace.

10. In teaching us to pray the “Our Father”, Jesus begins by asking the Father to forgive our trespasses, but passes immediately to the challenging words: “as we forgive those who trespass against us” (cf. *Mt 6:12*). In order to forgive others their trespasses and to offer them hope, we need for our own lives to be filled with that same hope, the fruit of our experience of God’s mercy. Hope overflows in generosity; it is free of calculation, makes no hidden demands, is unconcerned with gain, but aims at one thing alone: to raise up those who have fallen, to heal hearts that are broken and to set us free from every kind of bondage.

11. Consequently, at the beginning of this Year of Grace, I would like to offer three proposals capable of restoring dignity to the lives of entire peoples and enabling them to set them out anew on the journey of hope. In this way, the debt crisis can be overcome and all of us can once more realize that we are debtors whose debts have been forgiven.

First, I renew the appeal launched by Saint John Paul II on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 to consider “reducing substantially, if not cancelling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations”.<sup>[17]</sup> In recognition of their ecological debt, the more prosperous countries ought to feel called to do everything possible to forgive the debts of those countries that are in no condition to repay the amount they owe. Naturally, lest this prove merely an isolated act of charity that simply reboots the vicious cycle of financing and indebtedness, a new financial framework must be devised, leading to the creation of a global financial Charter based on solidarity and harmony between peoples.

I also ask for a firm commitment to respect for the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, so that each person can cherish his or her own life and all may look with hope to a future of prosperity and happiness for themselves and for their children. Without hope for the future, it becomes hard for the young to look forward to bringing new lives into the world. Here I would like once more to propose a concrete gesture that can help foster the culture of life, namely the elimination of the death penalty in all nations. This penalty not only compromises the inviolability of life but eliminates every human hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation.<sup>[18]</sup>

In addition, following in the footsteps of Saint Paul VI and Benedict XVI,<sup>[19]</sup> I do not hesitate to make yet another appeal, for the sake of future generations. In this time marked by wars, let us use at least a fixed percentage of the money earmarked for armaments to establish a global Fund to eradicate hunger and facilitate in the poorer countries educational activities aimed at promoting sustainable development and combating climate change.<sup>[20]</sup> We need to work at eliminating every pretext that encourages young people to regard their future as hopeless or dominated by the thirst to avenge the blood of their dear ones. The future is a gift meant to enable us to go beyond past failures and to pave new paths of peace.

#### IV. *The goal of peace*

12. Those who take up these proposals and set out on the journey of hope will surely glimpse the dawn of the greatly desired goal of peace. The Psalmist promises us that "steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss" (*Ps* 85:10). When I divest myself of the weapon of credit and restore the path of hope to one of my brothers or sisters, I contribute to the restoration of God's justice on this earth and, with that person, I advance towards the goal of peace. As Saint John XXIII observed, true peace can be born only from a heart "disarmed" of anxiety and the fear of war.<sup>[21]</sup>

13. May 2025 be a year in which peace flourishes! A true and lasting peace that goes beyond quibbling over the details of agreements and human compromises.<sup>[22]</sup> May we seek the true peace that is granted by God to hearts disarmed: hearts not set on calculating what is mine and what is yours; hearts that turn selfishness into readiness to reach out to others; hearts that see themselves as indebted to God and thus prepared to forgive the debts that oppress others; hearts that replace anxiety about the future with the hope that every individual can be a resource for the building of a better world.

14. Disarming hearts is a job for everyone, great and small, rich and poor alike. At times, something quite simple will do, such as "a smile, a small gesture of friendship, a kind look, a ready ear, a good deed".<sup>[23]</sup> With such gestures, we progress towards the goal of peace. We will arrive all the more quickly if, in the course of journeying alongside our brothers and sisters, we discover that we have changed from the time we first set out. Peace does not only come with the end of wars but with the dawn of a new world, a world in which we realize that we are different, closer and more fraternal than we ever thought possible.

15. Lord, grant us your peace! This is my prayer to God as I now offer my cordial good wishes for the New Year to the Heads of State and Government, to the leaders of International Organizations, to the leaders of the various religions and to every person of good will.

***Forgive us our trespasses, Lord,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
In this cycle of forgiveness, grant us your peace,  
the peace that you alone can give  
to those who let themselves be disarmed in heart,  
to those who choose in hope to forgive the debts of their brothers and sisters,  
to those who are unafraid to confess their debt to you,  
and to those who do not close their ears to the cry of the poor. AMEN.***

*From the Vatican, 8 December 2024*



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