

## CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

(CWLW)

19-25 Dec 2022

19-12-22

### **24 more towards beatification**

(19-12-22) In a series of decrees issued on December 18, the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints cleared the way for the beatification of ten candidates, and recognized the “heroic virtue” of fourteen more, qualifying them to be known as “Venerable.”

Among those who are now eligible for beatification are an entire Polish family—Jozef and Wiktorja Ulma and their seven children—who were executed by the Nazi regime because they sheltered Jews. Those who will now be known as “Venerable” include Matteo Ricci, the renowned Jesuit missionary of the 17th century; and Franz de Castro Holzwarth, a Brazilian layman who offered himself as a hostage during a 1981 prison riot, and was killed by gunfire when police stormed the prison.

### **Pontiff turns 86**

(19-12-22) Pope Francis turned 86 on December 17.

“Out of 266 papacies in Church history, Francis is now one of just eight – put another way, a statistically negligible 3% – to be 86 or older while still serving as Successor of Peter,” writes John Allen of Crux.

### **Italian Cardinal Poletto dead at 89**

(19-12-22) Cardinal Severino Poletto, the retired Archbishop of Turin, died on December 17 at the age of 89.

Ordained to the priesthood in 1954, he was named Coadjutor Bishop of Fossano in 1980, taking full leadership of the diocese later that year. He served as Bishop of Asti from 1989 to 1999, when he was named Archbishop of Turin. He received his red hat from Pope John Paul II in 2001.

With the death of Cardinal Poletto, there are now 224 living members of the College of Cardinals, of whom 126 are under the age of 80 and eligible to vote in a papal conclave.



### **Sri Lanka: Lay Catholics say no to public Christmas celebrations without the truth about the Easter Sunday attacks**

(19-12-22) The 2019 Sri Lanka Easter bombings killed 269 people and injured over 500. Twenty lay organizations have called on the nation’s bishops to boycott government Christmas celebrations.

### **Italy - Prayer vigil on the tomb of St. Nicholas, to ask for an end to the "war among Christians"**

(19-12-22) "Peace is a gift that goes beyond human capacities: for this we need God's help because, as we see, we cannot do it alone", says Father Emmanuel Albano OP, director of the Ecumenical Centre "Father Salvatore Manna OP" at the Pontifical Basilica of St. Nicholas to Fides regarding the historic moment on the occasion of the prayer for peace that the Italian Bishops' Conference invites for December 21 at the tomb of St. Nicholas in Bari to be presided over by its president Cardinal Matteo Zuppi.

In the climate of tension caused by the armed conflict that is sowing death and destruction in the heart of Europe, the Dominicans who have been governing the Basilica of St. Nicholas in Bari for more than 70 years are proving every day that - as Pope Francis keeps saying - welcoming others and engaging in dialogue, even with those who hold a position different from one's own, is the only valid alternative to tendencies toward division and conflict, both in human relations and between States. "The Basilica," continues Father Emmanuel, "has never stopped welcoming all those who feel connected to

the relics of the Saint. The Russian Orthodox community in Bari continues to regularly celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the Basilica, as does the Ukrainian-Orthodox community. The tomb of Saint Nicholas is still visited today by individual pilgrims and communities, both of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches".



### **Nigeria - Need to put an end to the escalation of domestic violence against women and children**

(19-12-22) Corruption, conflicts, oppression are some of the evils afflicting the Nigerian population. Added to these is domestic violence, a phenomenon that is increasing so much that it has prompted the intervention of the country's religious leaders. Representatives of the African Faith & Justice Network (AFJN) and the Dominicans for Justice and Peace (DJP) have urged the entire community on the alarming escalation. "We call on all faith

communities to sensitize their members and charge them to address this evil through structured sessions and collective reflection".

A statement released by the two bodies refers to the alarming escalation of violence in the homes, including spousal murders, and the inhumane treatment of house helpers. "Numerous incidences of sexual abuse of children by adults including their fathers", the statement reads. The text also refers to homes that have become places where children who serve as house helps are abused and traumatized 'in unimaginable ways'.

### **Mozambique - Self-defence militias legalized against the jihadists raging in the north**

(19-12-22) The Mozambique parliament has approved a bill that legalizes the involvement of local militias in the fight against jihadists in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. Defence Minister Cristóvão Chume, who presented the bill in parliament, admitted that the Mozambican army alone is not able to deal with the jihadists.

Local militias are already engaged in helping the Mozambican armed forces and military contingents sent from Rwanda and some states belonging to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in the fight against jihadists in the province.

According to the Minister, the local militia force was set up to "strengthen the role of the Defence and Security Forces in countering and containing the spread of terrorist incursions, protecting community settlements and public and private infrastructures". Therefore, he said the new law will allow for better "structuring, organization and logistical support" for local self-defence militias.

### **India - Young Catholics: celebrate Christmas with works of mercy, to "feed the hungry"**

(19-12-22) The spirit is to carry out a work of mercy, "feed the hungry", in the name of Christ Jesus who comes into the world to be close to every man, especially the poor and the suffering: this is why the young people of the Indian Catholic Youth Movement (ICYM), a reality under the aegis of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) of the Latin Rite has launched "Feed a Friend", a special charitable initiative to celebrate Christmas.

As Fides learns, the initiative, that started last year, has taken on particular variations according to the various contexts and the various states of the country, also finding collaboration and support from civil institutions or other religious communities.

The spirit of "Feed a Friend" is to help those in need by bringing food to the poorest and most marginalized families, both on the outskirts of cities and in rural areas. To do this, the structure of the parishes is used, with their knowledge and capillarity in the territory, the President of ICYM, Judy, reports. The president informs that "to get food, food collections are organized in the various communities but funds have also come through the collection of donations, which has seen the participation of people in India and abroad."

### **Colombia - Another year of violence: Bishops of Chocò call for a Christmas truce**

(19-12-22) "We welcome the willingness of the National Government and the ELN to launch humanitarian aid in our territory, which will help and encourage us in our commitment to peace. We appeal to the ELN, the Audifensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, the Fuerzas Revolucionarias Mexicanas and the Fuerzas Armadas RPS-Cartel del Norte to conclude a unilateral ceasefire to celebrate Christmas in peace and to show their willingness to engage in concrete gestures for peace" says an appeal published by Bishop Mario Alvarez Gomez of Istmina-Tadó, "on behalf of the Catholic Church in Chocó".

### **Indian tribal Christians protest social boycott, violence**

(19-12-22) Indigenous tribal Christians forced to abandon their homes and villages due to social boycotts and violence have urged authorities to take action against the instigators in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh.

Some 1,000 aggrieved Christians camped outside the office of the district collector in Narayanpur on Dec. 18 demanding action against local political leaders influenced by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and other Hindu nationalist organizations. Many among them including

women and children showed their injuries sustained during the public beatings they were subjected to in the villages when they refused to give up Christianity

"At least 300 families from Narayanpur and Kondegaon districts in the Bastar region were driven out of their homes in the past two months," Pastor Moses Logan, president of the Chhattisgarh State Christian Welfare Society, said. The pastor told UCA News that violence against Christians in Chhattisgarh has shown a marked increase in the past few months with public beatings, and destruction of homes and agricultural crops being the norm. The rise in attacks was attributed to police inaction. Activists accuse them of ignoring the complaint of the victims and siding with the attackers.

### **China forces Christians to honour late Communist leader**

(19-12-22) China's communist regime has instructed all Protestant Christians belonging to the state-controlled body, Three-Self Church, to pay tributes to Jiang Zemin, ex-president and former general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The instructions to remember Jiang was passed to national leaders of the Three-Self Church who gathered for a Memorial Conference in Shanghai in the first week of December, *Bitter Winter* reported. They were told all members of the Three-Self Church across China should do the same.

Jiang (1926-2022) was general secretary of the CCP from 1989-2002 and President of China from 1993-2003. He died on Nov. 30 this year due to leukemia and multiple organ failures.

### **Indonesian priest's social work earns Muslim award**

(19-12-22) An independent body co-founded by a priest in Indonesia's predominantly Catholic East Nusa Tenggara province has received an award from the Islamic cultural institute for its commitment to reducing maternal mortality rates.

The Regional Health Advisory Body (BPKD), which was initiated in 2008 by Divine Word Father Marcelinus Agot and several public figures in West Manggarai district and officially established in 2013, received this year's Maarif Award on Dec. 17.

The award was in recognition of the organization's social work in helping to reduce maternal mortality rates through maternal care houses built in the complex of community health centers, known as Puskesmas.



BPKD was among three recipients — two organizations and one individual — that received the award named after the late Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif, former head of Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, and the founder of the Maarif Institute for Culture and Humanity.

### **Christmas under the shadow of terrorism in Pakistan**

(19-12-22) Children at the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in Quetta have rehearsed well for a traditional Christmas play they were forced to abandon by a terror attack five years ago.

The mayhem caused by two suicide bombers at the church in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province in 2017 is still fresh in the minds of the survivors. The nativity play was never held thereafter due to the looming fear of terrorism and then the coronavirus pandemic.

This year, Pastor Bashir encouraged his three children to participate along with their friends, some of whom belong to families of the victims. The kids performed the nativity play at the jam-packed church on Dec. 11. "Their spirits were high thanks to the Sunday school training. Even those injured sang jingles. We are not afraid of terrorists," said Bashir to UCA News.

The Methodist Church has dedicated the fourth Sunday of Advent to the martyrs.

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### **Pope Francis honours people who care for 'poorest of the poor'**

(20-12-22) Pope Francis honored Gian Piero (a homeless man), Father Hanna Jallouf (who ministers in Syria), and Silvano Pedrollo (an Italian businessman) with the Mother Teresa Award, given by the Dicastery for the Service of Charity.

### **Liechtenstein prelate cancels Mass for parliament after same-sex marriage approval**

(20-12-22) Archbishop Wolfgang Haas of Liechtenstein has announced that he will not celebrate Mass for the opening of parliament, as usual, because of the body's approval of legislation giving legal recognition to same-sex marriage.

The archbishop explained that "such a liturgical celebration no longer makes sense in view of the parliamentary behavior of the vast majority... in a matter concerning Christian ethics." He warned that the approval of legislation allowing "marriage for all" will lead to a further breakdown on moral standards, pointing to the experiences of other nations "where gender ideology and LGBT propaganda reaches into the schools."

### **Pope returns Greece's Parthenon sculptures in ecumenical nod**

(20-12-22) In an ecumenical gesture, Pope Francis is donating three marble fragments in the Vatican Museums to Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens, the primate of the Greek Orthodox Church.



### **Bishop calls on US to pressure Nicaragua to free dissident bishop**

(20-12-22) "I call on the US Government and the international community to pursue the immediate release of Bishop [Rolando] Álvarez, the restoration of religious freedom and human rights guarantees, and initiate a process of restoring the democratic order and rule of law in Nicaragua," said Bishop David Malloy of Rockford (IL), chairman of the US bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace.

### **Italian Catholic groups push for 'disinvestment' in fossil fuels**

(20-12-22) Citing the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'*, several Italian Catholic groups have issued call for investors to withdraw their support from firms connected with fossil fuels.

In their statement the groups said that the use of fossil fuels promotes "an extractive and plunderous economy whose geopolitical interests are causing conflicts around the world, particularly in Ukraine."

### **Haitian bishops plead for end to violence**

(20-12-22) The Catholic bishops of Haiti, in a Christmas statement, have made a plea for armed gangs to “stop the murderous madness of hatred, of contempt for life.”

The bishops, emphasizing “the extreme gravity of the situation,” argue for an end to “the culture of impunity which is the logical cause of the perpetuation of corruption and violence in the country.” They urge support for a national police force to bring stability and security to Haiti.

### **At lighting of Christmas tree in Jerusalem, Orthodox Patriarch says Christians are targeted by Israeli groups**

(20-12-22) “Christians have become the target of repeated and continuous attacks by radical Israeli groups, especially in the Holy City,” said Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem, according to the Palestinian News & Information Agency.

He added, “For the past decade, countless crimes have been committed against Christians, including physical and verbal attacks against priests and clergy, attacks have been targeted against churches, holy places have been vandalized and systematically desecrated, in addition to continuous intimidation of Christian citizens.”

### **French bishop removed from ministry, may face criminal charges**

(20-12-22) The former Bishop of Cayenne, French Guyana, now living in retirement in France, is under investigation on charges of human trafficking.

Bishop Emmanuel Lafont is charged with assisting a young Haitian man, with whom he allegedly had an improper relationship. A Vatican investigation resulted in his trial, conviction, and removal from public ministry. The bishop, who retired in 2020 on reaching the age of 75, has been ordered to spend the remainder of his life in seclusion, living in a French monastery.

### **Soccer star Messi promised to make pilgrimage after World Cup win**

(20-12-22) Lionel Messi, the star of the Argentine soccer team, had vowed to make a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine if the team won the World Cup—as it did last Sunday.

In 2018 Messi, who is a practising Catholic, told an interviewer that if he won the World Cup, he would walk from his home to the shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary at San Nicolas, a distance of about 25 miles.

**Catholic charity lauds King Charles’ meeting with victims of extremism in Nigeria.** King Charles III met recently in England persecuted Nigerian Christians.



### **Philippines - The documents of Pope Francis in the Tagalog language to bring "the joy of the Gospel" to all**

(20-12-22) "A message expressed in one's own language is deeper. It is more alive, has a stronger grip and is more attractive to the reader or listener. So we hope that Pope Francis' words can reach many Filipinos, even less educated, to bring the message of God's love and the Good News of the Gospel". With these words, Cardinal Jose Advincula, Archbishop of Manila, presented to the faithful the collection of documents and letters of Pope Francis translated into Tagalog (the local language of the Philippines), and which have just been published by Claretian Publications with the permission of the Vatican Publishing Library. The text, entitled "Ang Galak ng Ebanghelyo" ("The Joy of the Gospel"), collects all the most important texts of the pontificate, from the first encyclical 'Lumen Fidei' to the last apostolic letter 'Desiderio Desideravi'. The collection includes the encyclicals 'Laudato Si' and 'Fratelli Tutti', the apostolic exhortations 'Evangelii Gaudium', 'Amoris Laetitia', 'Gaudete et Exsultate' and 'Christus Vivit'; the apostolic letters 'Misericordia et Misera', 'Admirabile Signum' and 'Patris Corde'; and the bull 'Misericordiae Vultus'.

### **Haiti - The "cry" of the Bishops in the face of the extreme gravity of the situation: "Silence the weapons!"**

(20-12-22) "In the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, who came to bring us true peace, we launch a cry from our hearts as Pastors to our Haitian brothers and sisters, here and elsewhere, and to the international community, about the extreme gravity of the situation": this is the appeal of the Bishops of Haiti in their Christmas message.

The Bishops call on illegally armed groups and those who finance them to "stop the murderous madness of hatred, of contempt for life" and "silence your weapons!".

Quoting Pope Francis, they invoke: "Instead of fratricidal war, we must invest in peace and love, in the reorganization of our infrastructure, health and education systems, as well as in changing our mentalities". They observe that it is time to rebuild the institutions, especially Justice, "to curb the culture of impunity which is the logical cause of the perpetuation of corruption and violence in the country" to guarantee, with a spirit of belonging to this land of Haiti, a better future.

### **Nigeria - Diocese of Umuahia: Catholic priest kidnapped**

(20-12-22) Another Catholic priest has been kidnapped in Nigeria, Father Christopher Ogide, associate Pastor at Maria Assumpta Parish of Umuopara, diocese of Umuahia, in the state of Abia, in southern Nigeria.

According to the diocesan chancellor, the kidnapping took place on December 17 at the front gate of the parish hall and that Fr Ogide was allegedly on his way to refuel at a nearby petrol station.

The news of the priest's kidnapping comes just after the release of Father Abraham Kunat, kidnapped on November 8, in St. Mulumba, Kurmin Sara, in Kaduna State, northern Nigeria.

Kidnappings occur in almost all parts of Nigeria, from north to south, and not only priests but also lay men and women, usually to demand ransom.



### **Filipinos live Christmas spirit with pre-dawn Masses**

(20-11-22) Millions of Filipino Catholics are flocking to churches to attend the Simbang Gabi, a nine-day series of Masses starting on Dec. 16.

Simbang Gabi marks the early celebration of Christmas in the Philippines. However, this custom is not completely of native origin. It is believed to have been introduced by Spanish Catholic missionaries centuries ago. Now, it is celebrated by Filipinos both at home and abroad.

Filipino Cardinal Antonio Tagle, Prefect of the Congregation of the Evangelization of Peoples, presided over the Simbang Gabi at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, together with the Filipino community in the eternal city. In 2019, Pope Francis presided over Simbang Gabi at St. Peter's Basilica.

Simbang Gabi literally means "evening or night Mass." In the Philippines, it traces to *Missa Aurea* introduced by the Spanish missionaries to allow Filipino farmers to attend Mass. It is because farmers go to the fields to work in the morning and return by midday to avoid the scorching heat.

The Mass is known as *Missa de Gallo* or "Mass of the rooster" because roosters crow to announce the dawning of the day. Before the Catholics start attending Simbang Gabi Mass, churches are decorated with lights and balloons, but without a Child Jesus and nativity scene.

Filipino Catholics have other motivations behind the observance of the Simbang Gabi.

Legend has it that anyone who completes nine Masses and makes a wish on the final day will have their prayer answered. Some also believe Simbang Gabi helps wash away their sins and is the best spiritual preparation for Christmas.

However, a majority attend Mass because of their joyous anticipation of the coming of Christ.

## **Macau's migrants stressed over babies' deportation order**

(20-12-22) Dozens of migrant mothers in Macau are facing a crisis due to high airfare and financial woes after the authorities in the Chinese-ruled city ordered them to send their children, born during the Covid-19 pandemic, back home.

Many women non-resident workers (TNR) have received expatriation orders from the Macau administration, which further increases the stress on the workers who are already struggling with low wages, Portuguese daily *Hoje Macau* reported on Dec. 16.

Many mothers are struggling to get an extension of the visas for their children until January when the travel is cheaper. Some 28,000 Filipino women work in Macao, most of them Catholics. Employers deny airline tickets citing high airfare due to the Christmas holidays, further complicating the issue. Macau, now a special administrative region of China, was under Portuguese rule from 1557 to 1999. Catholicism came to Macau during the Portuguese period. Macau Catholic Diocese has some 30,000 Catholics in nine parishes across the island city.

## **Demand to end caste-based discrimination in Bangladesh**

(20-12-22) A rights body in Bangladesh has called for lifting the unwritten 'ban' on the entry of Dalits – the lowest outside the four main castes in the Indian subcontinent's social order– into restaurants and eateries after a youth burnt his hand in a scuffle over the issue.

The Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM) made the demand during a press conference held at the Bogra Press Club on Dec. 17 days after Mithun Bashfor, 23, suffered burn injuries at a local restaurant in the Santahar municipal area of the northern Bogra district.

The next day, on Dec. 18, police arrested Masud Rana, 33, a Muslim youth for allegedly pushing Bashfor and causing him to fall on boiling oil, after a heated argument over serving him inside the restaurant.

"This age-old rule, this racist treatment of a specific class of people who are in a minority, is a violation of human rights. All citizens of an independent country have equal rights. The ban on Dalit communities in hotels is a punishable offense," Bibhutoosh Roy, the central president of BDERM, told UCA News.



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## **Pope, at audience, concludes series on discernment : Aids to discern God's will**

(21-12-22) Pope Francis concluded his series of catechetical talks on discernment at his public audience on December 21, speaking about the aids to the process of discernment. The following is a summary of his talk:

Today we conclude our series of catecheses on spiritual discernment by considering some aids that can help us rightly to discern God's will for our lives and our happiness. We begin, naturally, with an encounter with the word of God and with the Church's teaching. Quiet prayer with the Scriptures helps us to sense the Lord's presence, to hear his voice, and to become conscious of the deepest desires of our heart. In this way, we grow in love and closeness to Jesus, who assures us of the Father's merciful love and, by his death on the Cross, reveals God's power to bring life out of death and good out of evil. Friendship with Jesus and trust in God's guidance of our lives is a great gift of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in our hearts and inspires our discernment at every stage. In the Church's daily prayer, each canonical hour begins by asking God to come to our assistance. Trusting in that help, may we learn to discern wisely the paths that lead us to the Father and to respond each day to his loving offer of salvation.

## **Pope champions role of labour unions**

(21-12-22) "There is no union without workers, and there are no free workers without a union," Pope Francis said in an audience with members of the Italian General Confederation of Labour, Italy's largest labour union.

### **Music is a path to peace, Pope tells Christmas concert artists**

(21-12-22) "With your song you help spread the message of love and life, touching many hearts and spreading the spirit of fraternity," Pope Francis said in an address to the artists of the Christmas concert in the Vatican. "That is how God works in history, even in the painful and desolate of scenarios."

### **Pope rues suffering of Ukrainian children, praised Poland for accepting refugees**



(21-12-22) At the end of his regular weekly audience on December 21, Pope Francis again spoke about the suffering of the people in Ukraine, and especially the children, during this time of war.

"When a child loses the ability to smile, it is serious," the Pontiff said. He lamented that Ukrainian children "are suffering, suffering so much, from this war."

Before ending his audience, the Pope saluted the people of Poland. Recalling the Polish custom of leaving an extra place set at the dinner table on Christmas Eve, for an unexpected guest, he remarked that this year, "that place will be occupied by the

multitude of refugees from Ukraine to whom you have opened the doors of your homes with great generosity.

### **Two more priests kidnapped in Nigeria**

(21-12-22) Father Sylvester Okechukwu was kidnapped late on December 20, taken from the rectory of his parish in the Kaduna state. One day earlier, Father Christopher Ogide was kidnapped at the front gate of his parish hall in the Diocese of Umuahia, in Abia State.

### **+Bishop Joseph Gao Hongxiao, OFM, 77**

(21-12-22) Bishop Joseph Gao Hongxiao, the underground bishop of Kaifeng since 2007, has died at the age of 77. Kaifeng is a city of 4.8 million in Henan Province (map), in eastern China.

"One of the main issues not resolved by the Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People's Republic of China is in fact vacant episcopal sees," AsiaNews reports. "Although the agreement was renewed last October, more than one diocese in three is still without a bishop."

### **Nigeria - The first Community of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Ikorodu born with the support of children, young people, parishioners and benefactors**

(21-12-22) A pastry school, sewing courses, computer science for young people, accompaniment of youth group movements, catechesis, are some of the areas in which the missionary Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) offer their service in Ikorodu (Immore kekele).

It is a suburb of Lagos, Nigeria, where the first community of the FMA was inaugurated on December 8, 2022. Everyone, children, young people, parishioners, benefactors, according to their abilities and availability, have contributed to the realization of this much desired reality.

In a conversation with Agenzia Fides, the sisters reported that the three nuns currently present work together with the local lay community, in the parish and with the people of the neighborhood.

### **South Sudan - Clashes between militias in Upper Nile and Jonglei: Bishop expresses concern**



(21-12-22) A total of 166 dead, 237 injured, 20,000 to 50,000 internally displaced persons, 3,000 refugees: these figures represent the tragedy experienced by the population of the States of Upper Nile and Jonglei in South Sudan since fighting between rival militias resumed in August. They are quoted by Bishop Stephen Nyodho of Malakal in a desperate appeal, which says: "I cordially invite you to listen to the voices of your conscience and see the suffering of your people". In an interview with "Eye Radio", Bishop Nyodho also recalled South Sudan's struggle for independence from Sudan, which ended in 2011 with the proclamation of a new state with the capital Juba. The brief period of peace was short-lived, however, as civil war broke out in December 2013. "My humble advice to the fighting groups is to stop the violence unconditionally, you are all brothers and sisters," appealed the bishop, recalling that "all communities in Upper Nile are paying the unnecessary price for a crime they never committed. I call upon you sons and daughters of the Upper Nile to come together and keep in mind the common good and interests of the region."

### **Pakistan - Interreligious meetings and closeness to the poor: the spirit of Christmas**

(21-12-22) The Christian communities of Pakistan live a Christmas characterized by traditional rites, inter-religious meetings and closeness and solidarity with the poor and oppressed. A custom that is practiced in parish communities is that of sharing food and gifts with the poorest communities, in the spirit of charity that makes Christ feel close to humanity: according to information from Fides, in Faisalabad, the local Caritas organization once again organizes a lunch for needy families, and in some parishes children freed from slavery in brick factories are welcomed and fed. The traditional Christmas greeting in Pakistan is the phrase "Bara din mubarak ho", which means "The blessing of Christmas upon you". The nation also celebrates a secular holiday on December 25, the birth of the "father of the nation" Muhammad Ali Jinnah: therefore, the holiday is also deeply felt by Muslim believers, who often participate in interreligious events.

### **Iraq - "Our Lady of the Hour": Church bells will be heard again in Mosul**

(21-12-22) Next March, three bells bearing the names of the Archangels Gabriel, Michael and Raphael will leave Normandy and find their destination in Mosul in the bell tower of the Church of Our Lady of the Hour. This was announced in the past few days by UNESCO, which is involved in projects to rebuild the historic part of the northern Iraqi city, which is still scarred by the devastation of years of jihadist occupation. The three bells were cast in the "Cornille Havard" foundry in Villedieu-les-Poêles in Normandy (France), a workshop employing 15 specialized craftsmen who combine modern technological tools with medieval traditions. Unesco also reports that restoration work on the entire church should be completed by 2023.



### **Spike in accidents after festive drinking in Philippines**

(21-12-22) Philippine authorities have reported a sudden spike in road accidents caused by intoxicated drivers across the country in December. The National Police Highway Patrol Group and the Land Transportation Office (LTO) reported that 84 people have died and 1,732 were injured since Dec. 1 due to road accidents involving drunk drivers. The LTO had responded to almost 1,500 road crash incidents, where 1,356 drivers tested positive for alcohol intoxication. Police likewise reported a 73 percent increase in road accidents compared to 2021. "The rate is alarming because this is the first Christmas after the pandemic when government restrictions have eased. For almost three years, public gatherings were prohibited and people were afraid of Covid-19. Now, everything is beginning to go back to normal," Manila police inspector Donald Cornejo told UCA News. Cornejo, however, said although there were fewer restrictions on public gatherings this year, motorists should not drink before driving.

## Indian Church against rollback of scholarships for minorities

(21-12-22) Church leaders have criticized a decision by India's federal government to scrap a scholarship scheme for students of religious minorities pursuing higher education, saying the move will deprive those of marginalized sections the opportunity to come up in life.

Federal Minority Affairs Minister Smriti Irani informed the parliament of the decision to do away with the Maulana Azad Fellowship (MAF) on Dec. 8. The government earlier announced the scrapping of the pre-matric scholarships for minority students from Class 1 to Class 8. The fellowship offers five-year financial assistance to those from six communities of religious minorities – Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jains, Parsis and Sikhs – to pursue postgraduate academic research programs like M.Phil and Ph.D.

Irani said the fellowship will be discontinued from the 2022-23 academic session as it overlapped with various other fellowship schemes offered by the government. The minister said 6,722 candidates were selected since 2014-15 for the fellowship from universities and institutions across the country. "The action of the government shows its mindset, which does not jell with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's slogan, '*Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas*' [taking everyone along to ensure development for all]," Auxiliary Bishop Theodore Mascarenhas of Ranchi, former secretary-general of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), told UCA News. Bishop Mascarenhas reminded the government's own admission that some 800 million Indians have no food to eat, saying education was the ladder to help them pull out of poverty and better their lives. "This is a heartless government that does not care for the poor and the marginalized," Bishop Mascarenhas added. Bishop Thomas Dabre of Pune and Archbishop Anil Couto of Delhi have also expressed similar concern.

## Korean inter-faith group pays tribute to Halloween victims

(21-12-22)) Hundreds of members of seven major religions in South Korea joined an inter-faith memorial service to honour the victims of the tragic Itaewon Halloween stampede in October that left 154 killed.

Retired Archbishop Hyginus Kim Hee-joong of Gwangju, chairman of the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Korea (CBCK) stated that the pain of the victims should not be ignored. "I urged the government as well as society to more actively consider measures that can ease the pain even a little bit for the bereaved families along with the prayers asking for acceptance," Archbishop Kim said during the memorial.

People laid down flowers at the venue holding papers with the words "please remember us" written on them.



## Vietnam's ethnic villagers long for Christmas celebrations

(21-12-22) Ethnic village people in Vietnam are longing to celebrate Christmas but are facing government restrictions.

"We are only too eager to erect nativity scenes at our homes to join other people around the world in marking Jesus' birthday but we are not allowed," Ho Thi Niu, a new convert and a 29-year-old mother of two from Khe Cao village of Trieu Nguyen commune in Dakrong district says. The village has 14 Catholic families. Local people said government authorities

force them to be true to the late president, Ho Chi Minh, founder of the country, and his Communist Party. In the past, they were asked to hang Ho's pictures in their houses.

In 2019, a local family bravely made a creche and a star-shaped lantern and placed them in front of their house to celebrate Christmas. However, they later found them destroyed after they returned from a Christmas Vigil at Ba Long Church, 15 kilometers away from their home. Francis Xavier Ho Sung, head of the Khe Cao mission station, said local people have attended Christmas Masses at their homes for at least two years without nativity scenes. They used a cross and a statue of the Holy Family instead of a creche during the celebrations.

Father Thaddeus Tran Minh Danh from Ba Long sub-parish said he was allowed to celebrate the first Christmas Mass at Sung's house in 2020 after he tried to build a good relationship with government officials by giving them 200 million dong to dig 25 wells for public use.

22-12-22

### **Faith requires constant conversion and change, Pope tells Roman Curia**

(22-12-22) In his annual Christmas message to the leaders of the Roman Curia, Pope Francis stressed the need for constant conversion, and warned sternly against “the secret belief that we have nothing else to learn from the Gospel.” “The worst thing that could happen to us is to think that we are no longer in need of conversion,” the Pope said. This, he said, is “the error of trying to crystallize the message of Jesus in a single, perennially valid form.” He insisted that the form of the faith “must be capable of constantly changing.”

Particularly for Church officials working at the Vatican, the Pope said, it is important to guard against “the temptation of thinking we are safe, better than others, no longer in need of conversion.” He spoke of the “elegant demons” who “enter smoothly, without our being conscious of them,” and tempt people to believe that they no longer have a need for conversion. As example of this temptation, the Pontiff cited the 17th-century French Mother Angelica, who “became the soul of the Jansenist resistance, intransigent and unbending even in the face of ecclesiastical authority. Of her and her nuns, it was said that they were pure as angels and proud as demons. They had cast out the demon, but he had returned seven times stronger, and under the guise of austerity and rigor he had introduced rigidity and the presumption that they were better than others.”

As he neared the conclusion of his address to the Curia, Pope Francis reflected on the horrors of war, and said that if “we truly want the din of war to cease and give way to peace, then each of us ought to begin with himself.”



### **Pope: Much can be done to stop Third World War fought piecemeal**

(22-12-22) The Pontiff made his remarks in an interview with Fabio M. Ragona, the Vatican reporter for TGCom24 (an Italian television news channel) and *Il Giornale* (the Milan-based newspaper). During the interview, the Pope also said, “This is important: we can have a very organized Curia, a very organized parish, a very organized diocese, but if there is no missionary spirit, if you don’t pray in there, nothing moves ahead. Prayer is important.”

### **‘It is so difficult to comfort a mother’s tears,’ Pope tells families of Israelis held captive by Hamas in Gaza**

(22-12-22) On December 21, Pope Francis received the families of two Israelis held captive by Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip. Also present were the family members of two slain soldiers whose remains Hamas has refused to return to Israel.

### **Montreal police told not to wear St. Michael badges**

(22-12-22) Police officers in Montreal have been informed that they can no longer wear badges on their uniforms that show an image of St. Michael the Archangel. The badges have been classified as religious symbols, which are forbidden by a 2019 law designed to protect the secularity of the government.

### **Bishops ‘gravely concerned’ over Scottish government’s gender bill**

(22-12-22) “The bill introduces a system of self-identification, allowing a person to change their legal sex without the need for a medical diagnosis of gender dysphoria or having to consult a doctor,”

Scotland's bishops warned. "Children must be protected from making permanent legal declarations about their gender which may lead to irreversible elective interventions, including surgery."

### **Wife, son of Ukrainian prisoner of war meet Pontiff**

(22-12-22) The meeting took place after the Pope's December 21 general audience; Diane Yurash, the wife of Ukraine's ambassador to the Holy See, was also present at the meeting.

### **European churches' Christmas message: War is a wound to humanity**

(22-12-22) The presidents of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and COMECE have issued a Christmas message for peace in Ukraine and beyond.

The Conference of European Churches is a fellowship of over 100 Orthodox and Protestant communities; COMECE is the Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of the European Union.

### **Church in Ethiopia 'suffers with its people,' bishop says**

(22-12-22) In "A Letter from Ethiopia," Bishop Lisane-Christos Matheos Semahun of the Eparchy of Bahir Dar-Dessie describes the effects of the Tigray War, which began in 2020.



### **Africa - Peace and Release for the 10 hostages still in the hands of their kidnapers and for the whole Sahel**

(22-12-22) "At Christmas, families are used to gathering around a set table and celebrating together, but for some there will be an empty place in their hearts", says Father Pier Luigi Maccalli, speaking of the approaching Christmas celebrations. The missionary was lived in captivity for over two years in the Sahel and was released in 2020. "The strong communion of heart with all the innocent victims is certainly one of the gifts that the desert of captivity has left me - writes the priest of the Society

for the African Missions. This Christmas 2022, my thoughts are with the 10 hostages in the Sahel who will spend another holiday away from home. I cannot help but express my solidarity with the families of all the hostages in the Sahel, and this year my prayer before the manger is for them: may there be peace and liberation for them and the Sahel". Kidnappings happened between 2015 and 2022.

### **Zambia – Catholic Relief Services supports programmes to find alternatives to charcoal**

(22-12-22) The Catholic Relief Service (CRS) is helping the Youth Climate Champions programme to overcome the informal economy based on the collection of wood charcoal that creates serious environmental damage in Zambia.

CRS is helping the Youth Climate Champions by providing them with solar panels as an alternative to charcoal as the main source of energy and income.

Youth Climate Champions campaign against deforestation and charcoal burning in local communities, engaging charcoal burners and encouraging them to stop the practice. Instead, the youth participate in a reforestation program to plant new trees.

### **Pakistan - For Shagufta Kiran the second Christmas away from her children**

(22-12-22) Almost a year and a half has passed since the arrest of Pakistani Christian woman, Shagufta Kiran and the imminent one is, for her, the second Christmas spent in prison, away from her two children. Shagufta Kiran, 35, was accused of blasphemy for having forwarded a message on a chat on the social media "WhatsApp" which included content deemed "blasphemous". In a letter written to her children - sent to Fides by her lawyers - the woman reveals "I can no longer bear being away from you and wish with all my heart to be reunited with you." "I wish so much and I ask God to be able to enjoy Christmas together with you again, united as a family". The children have been forced to leave their home after their mother's incarceration.

## **Indian archdiocese's centenary eclipsed by liturgy divide**

(22-12-22) The Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church remains a divided house as the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly launched year-long celebrations to mark its centenary.

Around 200 priests from the archdiocese concelebrated Mass led by Father Antony Narikulam, rector of the St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica, on Dec. 21. No bishops attended it. Father Kuriakose Mundadan, secretary of the council of priests, delivered the message of the celebrations that entail year-long events, which were unveiled at a public meeting later.

The inaugural Eucharist was held at a college close to Mount St. Thomas, the headquarters of the Church and home to its head, Major Archbishop Cardinal George Alencherry. The archdiocese is the seat of the Major Archbishop. Father Jose Vithayathil, the senior-most priest in the archdiocese, lit the ceremonial lamp to mark the occasion and special candles were lit across all the churches in the archdiocese.

Father Mundadan told UCA News that since Ernakulam-Angamaly was the first archdiocese of the Syro-Malabar church, its centenary also becomes the centenary of establishing the Syro-Malabar Church's hierarchy. "But celebrations were restricted to the Ernakulam-Angamaly Archdiocese," Father Mundadan told UCA News when asked about the absence of bishops. "We did not invite the top hierarchy as they were dead against our traditional mass and we planned the inaugural mass in our traditional format," he added.

The Vatican elevated Ernakulam-Angamaly to the hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church on Dec. 21, 1923. It is among the 23 Eastern rite Catholic Churches in full communion with the Vatican.

## **Bishops' chief urges Modi to invite pope to India**

(22-12-22) Archbishop Andrews Thazhath, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to invite Pope Francis to India during a meeting in New Delhi on Dec. 21.

Archbishop Thazhath, who was elected CBCI president last month at a biennial meeting in Bangalore, also conveyed Christmas greetings to the prime minister on behalf of the Church in India.

During the meeting, which was also attended by federal ministers V. Muraleedharan and Rajeev Chandrasekhar, (both from the archbishop's home state Kerala, and members of the ruling pro-Hindu Bharathiya Janatha Party) the archbishop repeated a request made by his predecessor Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Bombay to invite Pope Francis to India.

The prime minister replied that "he had already invited Pope Francis to India" and repeated the invitation to the pope "again personally when he met Pope Francis at the Vatican" on Oct. 31, 2021, the Dec.21 press release said. Modi, who attended the G20 summit in Rome in October last year, met Pope Francis at the Vatican and asked him to visit India.

"The PM said that he would continue to invite Pope Francis and try to bring him to India,". The prime minister also assured him that he would continue to support minorities, the release said, adding that Archbishop Thazhath requested Modi to address the plight of Christians who are facing increased persecution.



## **UNSC demands end to violence in Myanmar**

(22-12-22) The UN Security Council called for Myanmar's junta to release Aung San Suu Kyi on 21 Dec. as it adopted its first ever resolution on the situation in the turmoil-ridden Southeast Asian country. The 15-member Council has been split on Myanmar for decades and was previously only able to agree on formal statements about the country, which has been under military rule since February 2021.

## **Deaf Pakistanis celebrate Christmas with a difference**

(22-12-22) It was a Christmas event with a difference. The worship, sermons, hymns, traditional play and even jokes were in sign language for the participating deaf Christians.

"They face discrimination for being special and hence are our top priority today. Those who can speak must take the back seat," said Salas Rashid, coordinator of the Language Recordings Institute (LRI) in Lahore.

The ministry has produced audio recordings of biblical stories in 45 local languages in the past 35 years. Last year, it launched Pakistan's first sign language church. Its members include more than 30 Christians with hearing loss, aged six to 46, in the Lahore and Sahiwal districts of Punjab province. Santa hats were handed out to the deaf while their family members received Christmas tree tags at the Dec. 18 gathering in Bahar Colony, a rundown Christian neighborhood in Punjab's capital. The deaf worshippers were asked to lip-read and follow the gestures of their teacher.

Sabir Michael, a blind Dominican and assistant professor at the University of Karachi lauded the LRI's efforts for PWDs and urged the Church to support such groups.

"The Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference should let us know if they have any policy regarding the PWDs regarding their participation in Holy Mass and receiving the sacraments. There are zero job opportunities for PWDs in Catholic institutions," he said.

### **Switzerland - The Star Singers, a tradition of very ancient origin**



(23-12-22) "I like to make others happy; it is nice when we knock on doors and people see us and start to smile; we can support projects with the work of the Star Singers and help other children. This makes me happy; I like to sing together!". These are just some of the comments from children and adolescents who participate in the action of the Star Singers, organized by the Swiss Pontifical Mission Societies (Missio Switzerland). It is a very old tradition that has its origin in the Gospel of Matthew, specifically in the passage in which

it is narrated that the Magi, who came from the East to adore the Child Jesus, allowed themselves to be guided by the Star. This passage from the Gospel of Matthew inspired the so-called "Christmas dramas" of the 14th century, represented by children who went from house to house, dressed as the Three Kings, with the star on their shoulders, singing Christmas carols and receiving some money as an offering. The sixteenth century marked the development of this tradition with Christmas carols accompanied by a blessing offered as a sign of good wishes for the coming year.

### **Nigeria - Third priest kidnapped in 6 days**

(23-12-22) In Nigeria, another Catholic priest, Father Mark Ojotu of the Catholic diocese of Otukpo, was kidnapped along Okpoga-Ojapo Road in Benue state on December 22, according to a statement sent to Fides from the diocese of Otukpo, in eastern Nigeria –This is the third kidnapping within 6 days.



On December 20 Fr Sylvester Okechukwu, from the diocese of Kafanchan, in the state of Kaduna, in the north-central part of the country, was kidnapped, while on December 17 Fr. Christopher Ogide, associate parish priest of Maria Assumpta parish of Umuopara, diocese of Umuahia, in the State of Abia, in southern Nigeria was kidnapped.

### **Malaysia - After the severe floods, more than 70,000 people will experience Christmas as displaced persons**

(23-12-22) "We are shocked by the catastrophic event of the floods that have hit many communities in eight states of the Federation. Many Christian communities that were celebrating the Advent season and preparing for the Christmas holidays with family gatherings, for a time of prayer and sharing, have been affected. We express our deep and heartfelt solidarity and spiritual closeness to the families of the victims and the displaced. In the coming days, the network of Christian Churches in the different states will launch initiatives of charity, consolation and solidarity. We will give the utmost support. The

Lord also comes in times of suffering and anguish bringing his spirit of love and consolation". These are the words to Agenzia Fides by Rev. Jonathan Jesudas, Methodist Christian pastor and General Secretary of the "Malaysian Council of Churches", an ecumenical body, after the floods that first hit the Malaysian state of Kelantan and then other areas, touching a total of eight states of the Federation, both in Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo, forcing more than 70,000 people to experience Christmas as displaced persons.



### **Peru - We ask for peace, tranquility, unity and reconciliation, based on a broad process of listening and national dialogue**

(23-12-22) "We Peruvians want a society marked by hope, dialogue, social peace, justice and human development. In the same way, we ask the international community to respect our sovereignty and the democratic transition that our country is experiencing. The great message that we want to convey is to treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves, an ethical principle that we must all share". This

is a passage from the joint declaration signed by representatives of 16 religions and faith communities present in Peru, drawn up at the end of a meeting in which they discussed the dramatic events in the country, calling for "peace, tranquility, to unity and reconciliation based on a broad process of listening and national dialogue".

On December 14, the government declared a state of emergency across the country for 30 days.

### **Selling Christmas in Muslim-majority Bangladesh**

(23-12-22) The acceptance of Christmas festivities in mainstream society shows a major social change in the country and it could help build a non-sectarian nation, say sociologists and Christian leaders.

"It is actually a social change and through it, the universality of Christmas is increasing and this change is very positive for us," said sociology Professor Shah Ehsan Habib of Dhaka University. He said Christmas decorations have become normal in hotels, restaurants, or shopping malls during the Christmas season, which was not the case a decade ago. "We now see different kinds of Christmas decorations because people like Christmas" in this country for its universal festive spirit, he said. Nirmol Rozario, president of the Bangladesh Christian Association, said he has noticed an increase in Christmas decorations in hotels and shopping malls over the past decade or so. "This sends a good message to people of other religions about Christmas. It will play a major role in building a non-communal country," he said.

Christians, mostly Catholics, are a tiny minority in Bangladesh numbering some 600,000 in a population of about 165 million. An estimated 100,000 Catholics live in the capital Dhaka and nearby areas covered by the Archdiocese of Dhaka. The city also has a floating population of Catholics as hundreds of young people come to study and work in the city from villages.

### **Vietnamese converts bring others to Christmas**

(23-12-22) Those people, who have been attending courses in catechism for years to join the church, annually erect nativity scenes to decorate the church and celebrate Christmas.

Fourteen creches erected by groups of converts and children will be displayed around the church to attract people to visit the church and watch Christmas vigil performances. Groups that create the most beautiful creches will be given awards as a way to foster the tradition of making nativity scenes.

"Christmas attracts many people from other faiths so it is a marvelous opportunity for local Catholics to warmly welcome, well mix with them, offer them gifts and introduce Jesus to them. In doing so, people will be on friendly terms with Catholics and familiar with churches," Father John Baptist Truong Thanh Cong, pastor of the Rach Vop parish, based in the Ke Sach district of Soc Trang province in the Mekong Delta, said.

24-12-22

### **Nuncio to Ukraine: ‘May it be a Christmas without missiles’**

(24-12-22) Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, the Apostolic Nuncio to Ukraine, expresses his hopes that Ukrainians may celebrate Christmas in peace without the looming destruction of Russian missiles.

*“This is our first wish: a safe Christmas, a Christmas without missiles, without explosions... And a Christmas of prayer in which there is the great solidarity of the world.”* This Christmas wish and prayer was expressed by the Apostolic Nuncio to Ukraine, Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, in an interview with Svitlana Dukhovych.

The prospects for such a Christmas ceasefire remain dim, as Russian bombs continue to gut homes and claim lives, while leaving millions without power and heating in the freezing weather. *“For believers, especially for Christians, this is also a way of being spiritually united with the Holy Family because of how they experienced Christmas.”*

Archbishop Kulbokas added that the war has encouraged many people to return to their faith, and now Christmas will offer a glimpse of light in the “midst of so much suffering.”

### **Pope: Peace begins in every person, in every family, in every city**

(24-12-22) Pope Francis has reiterated his urgent call to all men and women of goodwill to be peacemakers “because this is what we need today!”

In a video message recorded this month during an audience with Father Ángel Garcia Rodriguez, founder and President of the “Mensajeros de la Paz” association, the Pope encouraged operators and volunteers of the association to “help end conflicts so that peace may follow.”

He said that world peace is in a sad state at this moment and called for peacemaking in all situations.

*“Also the smallest peace, the peace of the small towns, the peace of small families that need the peace of each person.”*

### **Pope at Christmas Mass: ‘Jesus shows God's closeness amid consumerist haste’**

(24-12-22) *“If you feel consumed by events, if you are devoured by a sense of guilt and inadequacy, if you hunger for justice, I, your God, am with you.”*

As the Church celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ, Pope Francis offered that assurance to Christians around the world as he presided over Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica on Saturday evening.

In his homily, the Pope noted that the Gospel of Jesus’ birth seeks to “lead us to where God would have us go”, even as we rush around consumed by consumerist goals. He focused his reflection on the importance that Luke the Evangelist places on the manger in which Mary lay her Son, noting that his Gospel repeats the term three times in the space of only a few verses (Lk 2). With the little detail of the manger, he said, the Evangelist seeks to show us God’s “closeness, poverty, and concreteness” in His Son, Jesus. Pope Francis lamented the proliferation of wars and injustice, and their deleterious effects on human dignity and freedom, especially that of children.

Yet, said the Pope, God’s Son is first laid precisely in that “manger of rejection and refusal”, making God present in even the worst conditions of human existence. Each of us can take heart in God’s closeness to our suffering and loneliness, he said. “The poverty of the manger,” he said, “shows us where the true riches in life are to be found: not in money and power, but in relationships and persons.” Jesus, added the Pope, is the greatest wealth we can achieve, especially when we learn to love and serve His poverty in the poor of our world. As Jesus lay in a manger “tenderly wrapped in swaddling clothes by Mary”, Jesus shows us that He wants to be clothed in our love for those around us who are most in need.

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Pope Francis also invited everyone to celebrate Christmas by doing something good for others, in order to let "hope be reborn anew in those who feel hopeless."

25-12-22



### **Pope at Christmas Urbi et Orbi: 'The Lord's birth is the birth of peace'**

Before imparting his customary "Urbi et Orbi" blessing ("to the city and the world") from the central loggia of St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis, gave his Christmas message underscoring the joy this day brings when we "turn our gaze to Bethlehem," and the "Lord comes to the world in a stable and is laid in a manger for animals" since there was no room at the inn when Mary was to give birth. "There were thousands of pilgrims gathered in the square on a sunny and mild day for this time of year.

*"Jesus is born in our midst; he is God with us. He comes to accompany our daily lives, to share with us*

*in all things: our joys and sorrows, our hopes and fears."* The Pope encouraged everyone to contemplate the true message of Christmas and rise above "the hue and din" of this time when the focus can be more on the festivities and gifts, hardening our hearts, rather than focussing on the great event of the Son of God born for us.

The Pope said: *"Jesus Christ has opened the way that leads from a world closed in on itself and oppressed by the dark shadows of enmity and war, to a world that is open and free to live in fraternity and peace. Let us follow that road!"*

To follow Jesus means doing away with the burdens that can weigh on us and become obstacles, including greed, pride, thirst for power, hypocrisy, problems of old as they are of today that "exclude us from the grace of Christmas" and "block the entrance to the path of peace." The Pope lamented that a result of this reality is that the "icy winds of war" still hurt humanity today.

Looking at our world today, the Pope called on everyone to "see the faces of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters" who are experiencing darkness and cold this year, many far away from home due to ten months of war devastation.

*"May the Lord inspire us to offer concrete gestures of solidarity to assist all those who are suffering, and may he enlighten the minds of those who have the power to silence the thunder of weapons and put an immediate end to this senseless war!"*

The Pope decried today's grave "famine of peace" in other parts of the world of what he termed this "third world war." He recalled the people of Syria, still suffering from a years old conflict that has fallen into the background, and those living in the Holy Land where violence and casualties have increased in recent months. He prayed that in this land that witnessed the Lord's birth there may see renewed dialogue and efforts to build mutual trust between Israelis and Palestinians.

*"May the Child Jesus sustain the Christian communities living in the Middle East, so that each of those countries can experience the beauty of fraternal coexistence between individuals of different faiths."*

The Pope remembered the people of Lebanon and encouraged the international community to give the country a hand in its struggle for survival. "May the light of Christ illumine the region of the Sahel," so that peaceful coexistence between peoples may take root again over the conflicts in the region. The Pope then prayed for a lasting truce in Yemen, reconciliation in Myanmar and Iran, and an end to all bloodshed.

Turning to the Americas, the Pope mentioned in particular the people of Haiti, who have been suffering for many years, and he prayed that political authorities and all people of good will throughout the continents work together to overcome social and political tensions.

Recalling how Bethlehem means "house of bread," the Pope called on us to remember children who go hungry today while so much food is wasted and resources are spent instead on weapons. He pointed out how the war in Ukraine has worsened the reality of world hunger, especially in Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, facing widespread famine. He lamented how wars can use food as a weapon by making distribution difficult to people already suffering.

*"On this day, let us learn from the Prince of Peace and, starting with those who hold political responsibilities, commit ourselves to making food solely an instrument of peace."*

The Pope then called on our solidarity when remembering the unemployed and poor experiencing hardship in this time of economic crisis.

As Jesus came into a world marked by indifference and hostility, the Pope said today also we see the same with how foreigners and the poor face rejection today. He called on everyone to find room in their hearts for displaced persons and refugees who "knock at our door in search of some comfort, warmth and food."

*"Let us not forget the marginalized, those living alone, the orphans and the elderly who risk being set aside, and prisoners, whom we regard solely for the mistakes they have made and not as our fellow men and women."*

In conclusion, the Pope explained how Bethlehem "shows us the simplicity of God, who reveals himself not to the wise and the intelligent but to the little ones, to those with a pure and open heart," and that we may, like the shepherds, be "amazed by the unthinkable event of God who becomes man for our salvation." God, the source of all good, makes himself poor in Jesus and asks "as alms our own poor humanity."

*"Let us allow ourselves to be deeply moved by the love of God. And let us follow Jesus, who stripped himself of his glory in order to give us a share in his fullness."*

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