

CATHOLIC WORLD LAST WEEK

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10-4-23

Pope at Easter Urbi et Orbi: Christ is truly risen, hope is reborn for all!



(9-4-23) Pope Francis gave his traditional "Urbi et Orbi" Easter message on Sunday, appearing from the central loggia of Saint Peter's Basilica overlooking the Square below where he had just presided over the Easter morning Mass. The Mass and "Urbi et Orbi" (from the Latin: 'To the city and the world') message and blessing went out live on broadcasts around the world. Over one hundred thousand people filled the Square and surrounding avenues, which were navigated by the Pope in the popemobile as he greeted them following

the Mass.

As usual, the flowers donated by florists from the Netherlands appeared brilliantly under the mild Spring sunshine. Close to thirty thousand flowers adorned the square and the balcony of the loggia, recalling the theme of new life, hope, and joy at Easter.

In Jesus, the passage of humanity from death to life, sin to grace, fear to confidence and desolation to communion has been made, the Pope declared, wishing everyone a Happy Easter. In particular, he greeted the sick, the poor, the elderly and all those suffering that they may experience the passage from affliction to consolation. He called on everyone to remember and rejoice that "the Lord has built us a bridge to life" in defeating death, making it for us "the most important and beautiful day of history."

The Pope explained how the word "truly" in the Easter proclamation underscores that the Lord's resurrection is a reality, not just wishful thinking. And this means that humanity's journey has a sure footing in hope and therefore can move forward with confidence in facing the many challenges now and ahead.

"May we allow ourselves to experience amazement at the joyful proclamation of Easter, at the light that illumines the darkness and the gloom in which, all too often, our world finds itself enveloped," he said.

Looking at the urgent efforts needed to resolve conflicts and divisions and pursue paths of peace and fraternity, the Pope praised those who are doing all they can to offer assistance and welcome to people fleeing war and poverty. He asked that the Lord may open all our hearts to do the same.

The Pope prayed for peace for the "beloved Ukrainian people" and that the light of Easter may shine on the people of Russia. The Pope spoke of Syria, still awaiting peace, and earthquake victims there and in neighboring Turkey where our continued solidarity is needed.

Remembering the holy city of Jerusalem, the Pope prayed for a resumption of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, so that peace may prevail. He prayed for help to Lebanon as it struggles to regain stability and unity. He mentioned Tunisia as well, praying that the young and those suffering from social and economic hardship may not lose hope but find ways to build a future of peace and fraternity.

The Pope asked for help for Haiti where social and economic hardship still weigh heavily on the people struggling for a way out of their many challenges. May the Lord support peace and reconciliation efforts in Ethiopia and in South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, he recalled. And he prayed for consolation for victims of international terrorism, especially in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mozambique and Nigeria.

Pope Francis recalled Christian communities celebrating Easter in Nicaragua and Eritrea, praying for them and for all citizens that they may be able to freely and publicly profess their faith. The Pope then mentioned Myanmar that peace may prevail and enlighten the hearts of leaders so that "deeply-afflicted Rohingya may encounter justice."

He prayed specially for refugees, deportees, political prisoners, migrants and the most vulnerable. He also remembered to pray for the victims of human rights, drug abuse, human trafficking and other forms of slavery.

Raising his eyes to heaven the Pope prayed: "May you, the Lord of life, encourage us on our journey and repeat to us, as you did to the disciples on the evening of Easter: 'Peace be with you!'"

Pope Francis presides over Easter Sunday Mass

(9-4-23) Pope Francis presided over the Mass on Easter Sunday in St. Peter's Square for the 45,000 pilgrims to mark the Resurrection of Christ. The Catholic faithful were joined by tens of thousands of flowers from the Netherlands, which adorned the steps leading up to the Vatican Basilica and continued an annual tradition begun in 1985.

The Pope did not deliver a homily at the Sunday morning Mass, since he had already delivered his reflections the night before.

The Pope's Mass on Sunday morning wrapped up a whirlwind Paschal Triduum—or three days of Easter.

Despite spending three nights in hospital to receive treatment for bronchitis and being discharged only on 1 April, Pope Francis has presided over nearly every public engagement on his schedule.

The only event he followed from his home at the Vatican's Casa Santa Marta was the Way of the Cross held at Rome's Colosseum on Good Friday - due to harsh cold.

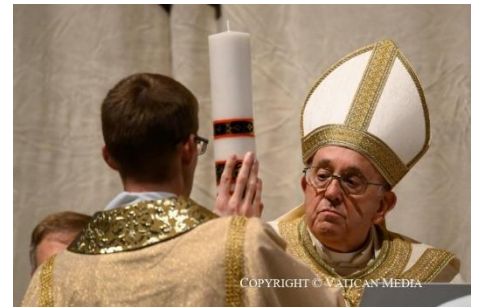
Easter Vigil Mass

(9-4-23) At the Easter Vigil Mass, Pope Francis had reflected on the surprise and joy of the women who visited the tomb where Jesus had been laid. Instead of Jesus' lifeless body, the women found an empty tomb and an angel who told them that He had been raised from the dead.

As the Pope noted, the women "went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to His disciples."

In the same way, he added, Easter should motivate all Christians to "leave behind our sense of defeat, to roll away the stone of the tombs in which we often imprison our hope, and to look with confidence to the future, for Christ is risen and has changed the direction of history."

In spite of our dreary routine, said Pope Francis, we must harness the power of Easter to revive the "beauty of that moment we realized that He is alive and we made Him the Lord of our lives."



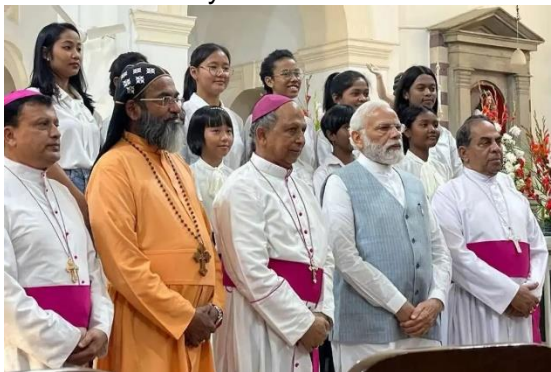
Pope at Regina Caeli on Easter Monday, Worries over Good Friday Agreement 25th anniversary

(10-4-23) As is customary, Pope Francis delivered a Regina Caeli address on Easter Monday to pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square. "Every time we announce it [the good news], not by propaganda or proselytizing, but with respect and love, as the most beautiful gift to share, as the secret of joy, then Jesus dwells in us even more," the Pope said.

After the Regina Caeli, he said he was praying that the Good Friday agreement signed 25 years ago ending violence in Northern Ireland can be "consolidated" to benefit the people of all of Ireland. But the Pope's appeal came as the agreement has come under strain following Britain's exit from the European Union.

Chinese Catholics celebrate Easter Triduum after three-year lockdown

(10-4-23) Catholics in China were able to celebrate the Easter Triduum in their churches this year, after three years when the Easter ceremonies were forbidden because of the Covid lockdown.



Indian PM's cathedral visit evokes hope among Christians

(10-4-23) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Sacred Heart Cathedral in New Delhi on Easter Sunday evening, which Christian leaders say opens an opportunity for dialogue with the government aiming to put an end to harassment Christians face in the country.

Modi's visit to the cathedral on April 9, the first such visit since the leader of the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) became prime minister in 2014, came as Christian leaders continue to accuse Hindu groups of attacking their people in

most northern states where Modi's party runs state governments.

"We are very happy that the prime minister visited our cathedral and shared his Easter greetings with us," said Archbishop Anil Joseph Couto of Delhi, who welcomed him at the cathedral.

Bishops of two Eastern rite Churches in the Delhi region — Syro-Malabar Bishop Kuriakose Bharanikulangara and Syro-Malankara Bishop Thomas Antonios Valiyavilayil — also joined Archbishop Couto of Latin rite.

Archbishop Couto gifted him a small statue of risen Lord, which Modi accepted happily.

The visit, though short and symbolic, has sent a clear message, according to Archbishop Couto.

Cardinal Bo calls for peace, freedom in Myanmar

(10-4-23) Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon has appealed for peace and freedom in Myanmar, where tens of thousands of people, including Christians, continue to bear the brunt of an ongoing civil war between the military and ethnic rebel groups.

"As a nation and as a people, let us roll down the stones of hatred, human suffering and let the message of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, has risen ring in our hearts, in our streets and in every household in this nation," said Cardinal Bo in an Easter message on April 9.

Just like "the stone was rolled away from Jesus' tomb, so too can the stones that weigh us down be lifted, allowing us to experience the joy and freedom of new life in Christ."

Indian Christians differ with cardinal on persecution

(10-4-23) Christian leaders in India have refuted Kerala-based Cardinal George Alencherry's claim that Christians do not feel insecure under the rule of the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the country.

"Persecution against Christians has drastically increased ever since BJP came to power in the country," said A. C. Michael, president of the Federation of Catholic Associations of Archdiocese of Delhi. Michael was responding to an interview of Cardinal Alencherry, the head of the Eastern rite Syro-Malabar Church based in southern Kerala state, published by *The New Indian Express*, an English daily, on April 9.

The cardinal who leads more than 5 million Catholics belonging to one of 22 Eastern rite Catholic Church, reportedly said that "Christians do not have any such insecurity now," under BJP-ruled India and also praised the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

But Michael said the cardinal was wrong. "The fact is that there are continued waves of vile hate speech and targeted violence against the Christian community across the country," Michael told UCA News on April 10. Michael, a former member of Delhi's state minority commission, said the atrocities against Christians continue to rise every year since the BJP came to power in 2014. Quoting figures of the incidents of atrocities against Christians recorded by the United Christian Forum (UCF), he said 597 cases were reported from across the country in 2022 alone. "There have been reports of 200

incidents of violence against Christians across India in the first 100 days of 2023 itself,” Michael added.

Father Babu Joseph, a former spokesperson of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI), said, “There is no denial of the fact that there are incidents of intimidation, violence and even loss of life and property of Christian communities in some parts of the country,” the Divine Word priest told UCA News. He also underlined how Christian institutions in some Indian states face “unwarranted scrutiny and interference from certain biased authorities and statutory bodies,” which is a matter of concern.

John Dayal, a Delhi-based journalist and rights activist, also disagreed with Cardinal Alencherry and said certain outfits associated with the BJP were in fact the culprits behind attacks against Christians. “In BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh the police play an enthusiastic part in arresting pastors and other Christians based on false complaints and scores of them are still languishing in jail awaiting bail,” he said. In the Congress-ruled Chhattisgarh, he said, “The police are frozen in inaction.”

Heavy fighting erupts in Myanmar over Easter

(10-4-23) Heavy fighting erupted between the military and forces aligned with the armed wing of the opposition National Unity Government (NUG) around Shwe Kokko in southwest Myanmar over Easter forcing more than 10,000 civilians to flee across the border into Thailand.

Sources said the military-backed Border Guard Force (BGF) had clashed with militias from the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the NUG’s People Defense Force (PDF) which are opposed to the military takeover of the country two years ago.

They said initial strikes were launched by the PDF and KNLA on BGF posts near the casino in Shwe Kokko on April 5, escalating on Good Friday, and by Easter Sunday evening, Thai authorities said more than 10,000 civilians had fled.

Indian state lifts ban on religious visiting prisons

(10-4-23) The communist-led government in Kerala has withdrawn its ban on religious groups conducting counseling and prayer sessions for prisoners in the southern state, following the intervention of Cardinal Baselios Mar Cleemis, who heads the state bishops’ council.

Cardinal Cleemis, also the Major Archbishop of Kerala-based Syro-Malankara Church, appealed to the state’s Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, to withdraw the government’s March 31 order banning religious, mostly Catholics, visiting prisons and offering counseling and spiritual assistance.

Hindu fundamentalist party leaders in Kerala visit Bishops on Easter

(The Hindu, 10-4-23) Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders visited the homes of various prominent Bishops in Kerala on 9 April, Sunday, on the occasion of Easter, in what is being seen as a bid to forge close ties with the Christian community as part of its political strategy to woo minority communities ahead of the 2024 elections – an action dubbed by Opposition Congress party as a “mockery” and betraying the saffron party’s “double standards.”



11-4-23

UN official welcomes Vatican’s rejection of ‘Doctrine of Discovery’

(11-4-23) José Francisco Calí Tzay, UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, called on countries to follow the Vatican’s lead in rejecting the “doctrine of discovery,” which was used by colonial powers starting in the 15th century to justify the seizure of native lands.

Pope reflects on demons, exorcisms, in new interview

(11-4-23) Pope Francis said that the devil always sows discord and division, in an interview published as part of a new Italian book on exorcism.

The Pontiff reveals that he has never performed an exorcism himself, but relied on an exorcist that he appointed while he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires.

He also says that “there are some very dangerous demons, and I am talking about ‘polite demons’— of the sort Jesus warns against.

Catholic Relief Services ‘devastated’ after 2 staff shot and killed in Ethiopia

(11-4-23) Two staff members of Catholic Relief Services, the US bishops’ humanitarian agency, were killed in Ethiopia’s Amhara region.

‘We can reclaim our country,’ Nigerian archbishop says in Easter message

(11-4-23) Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, who wrote the Easter message, leads the Archdiocese of Abuja, Nigeria’s capital.

The nation of 225.1 million, the most populous in Africa and 6th most populous in the world, is 47% Muslim, 46% Christian (11% Catholic), and 7% ethnic religionist.

North Koreans to face punishment for extravagant wedding

(11-4-23) North Korea’s Communist regime has appointed lecturers to instruct citizens to have low-key wedding programs to express frugality and “patriotism” or face punishment for violations, says a report.

The “wedding guidelines” announced through community lectures by authorities stipulate that no “unpatriotic” extravagant banquets or over-the-top flower arrangements are done along with a barrage of other restrictions, *Radio Free Asia* reported on April 8.

An unnamed source in the South Hamgyong province said the authorities have cited the chronic food and fuel shortages as a reason to have modest ceremonies.



Thousands of Korean Christians join Easter Sunday rally

(11-4-23) About 4,000 Christians joined a rally in the South Korean capital Seoul on Easter Sunday in what was billed as the first large-scale Easter parade since Christianity arrived in the country four centuries ago.

The parade, organized by inter-denominational United Christian Churches of Korea, started from Seoul’s Gwanghwamun Square and passed through Seoul Plaza, and ended at the square, *The Korea JoongAng Daily* reported on April 10.

Kam Kyung-cheol, a parade organizer, said that it was “the first large-scale Easter parade in central Seoul in the 140-year mission history of Christianity in Korea,” referring to the beginning of Protestantism in the nation. Yi gwang-jeong, a Korean diplomat stationed in Beijing, was the first to introduce the concept of Catholicism to the majority-Confucian nation in 1603, according to the Association for Asian Studies. Protestantism was introduced following the arrival of Methodist missionary Horace Allen in 1884 and Presbyterian missionary Horace Underwood the next year.

Indonesia archbishop urges Catholics to fight child stunting

(11-4-23) An archbishop in a Christian-majority province with the highest stunting rate in Indonesia has called on Catholics to help reduce its prevalence in the spirit of Easter. “The role of all of us in overcoming stunted growth is also a real step towards realizing ecological justice in our lives,” said Archbishop Petrus Turang of Kupang during Easter Mass at St. Francis of Assisi Church in Kupang, the provincial capital of East Nusa Tenggara on April 9.

Stunting, or low height for age among children, is an indicator of poor nutrition and repeated illnesses such as diarrhea and intestinal worms, in addition to a mother’s own poor health and nutrition that affects the offspring.

The archbishop said it was time for Catholics to "take concrete steps" to tackle the issue which continues to be a serious problem in the province. He called on the faithful to help needy families provide proper nutritional intake for their children in a spirit of solidarity, as well as supporting government efforts on the ground.

Vietnam welcomes hundreds of new Catholics

(11-4-23) Hundreds of new converts from the indigenous Hmong community in Vietnam held Holy Week celebrations for the first time this year. "We are happy that some 200 Hmong villagers attended Palm Sunday Mass, Holy Week services and Easter celebrations for the first time at Hong Ngai sub-parish," said Father Joseph Nguyen Tien Lien, pastor of Mai Yen Parish in Hung Hoa diocese in northwestern Vietnam bordering Laos to the south.

The new converts, assisted by a seminarian and a nun, decorated a small chapel, which was built in March this year, with images of the Ways of the Cross and Sacred Heart, Father Lien added.

We had to teach the first timers how to fast on Good Friday, sing hymns, recite prayers in the Hmong language, the priest said.

The Hmong people are an indigenous group mainly found in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, and China. Most Hmong people in Vietnam are day labourers, eking out a living in tea gardens and rice fields. There are more than 20,000 Hmong Catholics living in remote and mountainous areas of Vietnam.

12-4-23

Pope rips 'keyboard warriors'

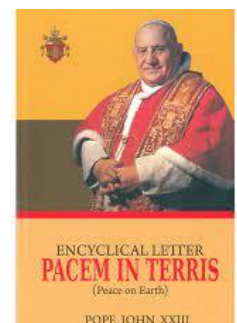
(12-4-23) At his Wednesday public audience on April 12, Pope Francis spoke on the evangelical zeal of St. Paul, contrasting it with forms of "a distorted zeal, oriented in the wrong direction." Here is the summary of his talk:

In our continuing catechesis on apostolic zeal, we have been reflecting on the example of the Apostle Paul. From his earlier experience as a persecutor of the Church, Paul was well aware of the danger of misguided zeal, or a zeal motivated not by love of Christ but by vanity or self-assertion. Authentic zeal for the Gospel is instead, Paul teaches, completely centred on Christ and the power of his resurrection. In his Letters, Paul uses the imagery of putting on the "armour of God" and exhorts his listeners to have their "feet shod" in readiness to proclaim the Gospel of peace (cf. *Eph* 6:13). The image is eloquent, since the feet of an evangelist must be solidly planted yet constantly in movement, ever ready to confront new situations in the effort to proclaim the Good News with creativity and conviction. May each of us, in the circumstances of our daily lives, prove zealous in discerning when and how best to proclaim the risen Jesus and his promise of the fullness of life and peace.

60th anniversary of Pope John XXIII's *pacem in terris*

(12-4-23) On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Pope Francis said:

Yesterday (11 April) marked the 60th anniversary of the encyclical *Pacem in terris*, which St John XXIII addressed to the Church and the world at the height of the tension between the two opposing blocs in the so-called Cold War. The Pope opened before everyone the broad horizon in which to speak of peace and to build peace: God's plan for the world and the human family. That encyclical was a true blessing, like a glimpse of serenity in the midst of dark clouds. Its message is very timely. Suffice it to quote this passage: "relations between States, as between individuals, must be regulated not by armed force, but in accordance with the principles of right reason: the principles, that is, of truth, justice and vigorous and sincere co-operation." I invite, said Pope Francis, the faithful and men and women of good will to read *Pacem in terris*, and I pray that the Heads of Nations may be inspired by it in their plans and decisions.



Arizona court ruling upholds confessional seal

(12-4-23) The Supreme Court of Arizona, USA, has upheld a claim by two Mormon bishops that they should not be required to answer questions about confidential conversations with members of their faith, in a case that bears directly on government recognition of the confessional seal.

The case involved a lawsuit charging that Mormon leaders had been negligent because they did not report complaints of sexual abuse of children. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints countered that the complaints had been heard in a confessional setting.

Pope again amends administration of Vatican court system

(12-4-23) Explaining that “needs have emerged over the last few years,” Pope Francis has issued a *motu proprio* revising the administration of the court system for Vatican City.

The new regulations—the third set of amendments that Pope Francis has made since March 2020, when he promulgated a new law governing the courts.

Among these changes, the Pope has allowed for magistrates to take other positions, in an effort to relieve the pressure of the larger case load in Vatican courts.

In 2023, 63 communities of the Moscow Patriarchate have joined the OCU

(12-4-23) Until relatively recently, Ukraine’s Orthodox faithful were divided into the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate), and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. In 2018, the latter two bodies united to form the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU).

Sudan - Female genital mutilation: More than a thousand Sudanese communities abandon the cruel practice

(12-4-23) In Sudan, almost nine out of ten women are subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM), despite the fact that a law penalizing this practice has been in force since July 2020. In the country, in addition to violence, abuse and exploitation, a third of girls between the ages of 0 and 14 have been subjected to FGM.

More than 1,300 communities throughout Sudan that have publicly declared the end of the practice of female genital mutilation. In addition, there has been a decrease in the prevalence of FGM from 89% in 2010 to 83.9% in 2018. The organization behind the study points out that, thanks to support for the community dialogue, social mobilization services and the promotion of political advocacy, more than 200 communities from 20 towns have committed to abandoning FGM.

Myanmar - Easter amidst fear, violence and hope in Mandalay, where innocent civilians die

(12-4-23) "Christ is risen and we are working to remove the sepulchral stones that threaten to bury our hopes. We strive for justice, peace and the healing of our war-wounded land. We trust in God that, with his help, a new era of peace and prosperity may return to Myanmar", says to Fides Father Dominic Jyo Du, parish priest of the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in the Archdiocese of Mandalay. The priest tells Fides about Easter and talks about the situation in the diocesan territory: "In Mandalay we celebrated Easter with the churches always filled to the full. There was an atmosphere of great fear and tension, but the situation was calm. In other areas of the diocesan territory, however, there is suffering and continued death. We prayed intensely for people in distress, tribulation, displacement. We are close to the destitute and displaced and, as a local community, we continue to organize works of charity, thanks to the coordination of the diocese. We lived Easter between fear and hope", he notes.

In the territory of Mandalay, the Sagaing region is affected by fighting and violence. Yesterday, April 11, 80 civilians, including children, were killed following a morning air raid conducted by the Myanmar Army in Kantbalu municipality. A fighter plane and military helicopter targeted the gathering of about 150 people, killing women, children and elderly people who had also gathered to celebrate the

beginning of "Thingyan", the traditional Burmese New Year. A second attack, with the killing of other civilians, occurred in the evening of the same day.

Costa Rica - Unprecedented violence that only national reconciliation can eradicate: "May the Risen Christ restore fraternity and justice"

(12-4-23) "Our nation is going through one of the most difficult moments in its history due to the number of murders that plunge our families into mourning, the violence that has penetrated all our communities and the fear that has seized society". This is the alarm launched by the Bishops of Costa Rica in their Easter message, addressed to "all the Catholic people and people of good will." The bishops note: "We must turn our gaze to the Risen Lord and implore his presence among us to restore peace in Costa Rica".

The challenges are enormous, which is why the Bishops reiterate that "only through a great national reconciliation that includes a sincere and effective dialogue involving all sectors, many of which are today opposed to each other for political or ideological reasons, can authentic paths of peace and harmony be built".



Many flee homes after 8 Christians killed in Bangladesh

(12-4-23) Some 200 people were forced to flee their homes in Bangladesh after eight tribal Christians were killed on Maundy Thursday (April 6) in a gun battle between two insurgent groups in a remote village in the restive Chittagong Hill Tracts.

They fled their homes fearing further violence in Khamtangpara, a village in Bandarban district where the attack took place on April 6, said Naiton Bawm, a leader of the ethnic Bawm people. "Around 200 people fled the area. They now live in government-

run schools. The government provides them with food. They can return home only when the situation becomes normal. We Bawm people live in fear," Naiton told UCA News.

Police recovered eight bodies from the village on April 7, Abdul Mannan, the Rowangchhari sub-district police chief told UCA News. All the dead were Christians — four Baptists and four Presbyterians, said Pastor Georgy Loncheu of the local Presbyterian Church. Those killed are suspected members of the Kuki-Chin National Front, a newly emerged rebel group, police said.

Appeal for peace after three Indian churches razed

(12-4-23) Christian leaders in India's northeastern Manipur state have appealed for peace after government agencies demolished three churches, saying they were built on unauthorized land. The state government, run by the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, initiated the demolition of churches claiming that they were built on government land in a tribal colony in the capital Imphal.

Government agencies demolished the churches on April 11 early morning, probably to avoid people's resistance and violence, said Father Francis Vialo, financial administrator of Imphal Archdiocese.

The demolished churches belong to Catholic, Baptist and Lutheran Churches, Vialo told UCA News on April 12. The catholic priest said his diocese bought the land of the demolished Holy Spirit Church some 20 years ago from a person, who it was discovered years later, used forged documents to sell away the land. The case has been going on for more than four years now.

Sri Lankan activists seek to torpedo anti-terror bill

(12-4-23) Religious leaders, trade unions, and activists in Sri Lanka have branded a proposed anti-terrorism law unwanted and urged diplomatic missions to intervene to roll it back.

Over 450 activists said that the proposed Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), which will replace the existing Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), is a more serious threat to democracy in the bankrupt Indian

Ocean nation. There is no need for a special terror law as there are adequate provisions within the existing law, they said in a statement. "The PTA has also been used to unjustly detain lawyers, religious leaders, journalists, student activists, opposition politicians and human rights activists from all ethnic communities. Many PTA detainees have been subjected to horrendous torture," said the activists, including 21 Christian, Buddhist religious leaders and Caritas Sri Lanka, the social arm of the Catholic Church, on April 11. Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith of Colombo had criticized the move to enact the new anti-terrorism law, saying it aims to silence critics and suppress people's protests.

Myanmar junta raids historic Catholic village again

(12-4-23) A historic Catholic village in Myanmar's northwest Sagaing region has been raided for the third time since March last year by the military junta which continues to target civilians in predominantly Christian regions.

Thousands of Catholics fled their homes within two days of Easter Sunday celebrations in Chaung Yoe village to escape artillery shelling and a raid early on April 11, according to local sources.

"Some villagers have been injured due to the shelling," said a local resident who wished to remain anonymous due to security concerns. The source said the villagers couldn't even gather their belongings and had taken temporary refuge in nearby villages. "The pews in Mary Help of Christian Church and some stuff inside the priest's center were destroyed, while some motorcycles were torched," the source added.

Catholic villagers from Chaung Yoe were among the estimated 5,000 people who fled from their homes as a result of the April 11 military raid, according to media reports. This is the third attack on the Catholic village in just over a year.



Pakistan's neo-Christian groups face state harassment

(12-4-23) Independent neo-Christian churches in Faisalabad city of Pakistan's Punjab province complain of harassment after the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) began a probe into their financial dealings. Some 300 people including pastors, Sunday school teachers and officials of charities were served notices last month, Christian leaders told a media conference on April 6.

The notice said those facing the probe are suspected to be "involved in money laundering" and they should personally present the details of their financial details at the agency's offices in Faisalabad. The details include the source of income, bank details, and proof of tax paid in the past five years besides personal and business details.

13-4-23

Latino Catholic population dropping

(13-4-23) The number of Latinos in the US who identify themselves as Catholic has plummeted, from 67% of the Latino population in 2010 to just 43% today, a new Pew Research survey shows.

While Protestant groups have made some inroads among Latinos, that number has grown only slightly—from 12% to 15%—over the same period. The most noteworthy increase has been in the proportion of Latinos who have no affiliation, which has jumped from 10% to 30%.

The percentage of Catholics is even lower among Latinos in the 18-29 age group (30%), and those who were born in the US (36%). It is substantially higher (48%) among those who identify themselves politically with the Democratic Party.

Although Catholics still easily outnumber Protestants among Latinos, the Protestants are more likely to attend religious services weekly (53%) than the Catholics (22%), the study found.

Religious hospitals should care for those left behind, Pope says

(13-4-23) Pope Francis spoke on the danger of “health poverty” in an April 13 address to members of the Religious Association of Social and Health Institutes (ARIS).

The Pope explained that he was speaking about “the increasing tendency of hospitals to discharge patients after a short time, favouring the treatment of the more acute phases of the illness over that of chronic pathologies.” As a result, he said, people with limited means often lack adequate care for their health problems.

Given this situation—which is compounded by the attitudes of a “throwaway culture,” the Pope said: “Religious hospitals have above all the mission to care for those who are discarded by the health economy.”



Orthodox in Jerusalem protest Israeli restrictions on Easter ceremony

(13-4-23) Orthodox Church leaders in Jerusalem are protesting the restrictions that Israeli authorities have placed on the traditional “Holy Fire” ceremony that takes place at Easter in the basilica of the Holy Sepulcher.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate has charged that the rules imposed this year, which limit the number of people in the basilica to 2000, are “unreasonable and unprecedented.”

Chinese priest missing; brainwashing feared

(13-4-23) A Chinese Catholic priest has gone missing, and his parishioners fear he is being subjected to “re-education” sessions as he seeks to join the “official” Church recognized by the government. Father Xied Tianming, who had been the pastor of an “underground” parish, disappeared after he indicated that he wanted to join the “official” Church. In such cases, authorities often keep the priest in custody during his “re-education,” to assure themselves that he will be loyal to the regime.

Adhere to arms control treaties, Vatican diplomat urges

(13-4-23) Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, apostolic nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, made his remarks following Russia’s announcement that it would suspend its participation in the New START treaty.

Catholic social doctrine is not a left v right issue, head of pontifical academy says

(13-4-23) On April 1, Pope Francis appointed Sister Helen Alford, OP, the dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Angelicum, as the president of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. In an interview, Sister Alford emphasized that “we need a much more relational view of the human person” than the individualism that arose from the Enlightenment. “So, it’s not an either or, an either rightwing or leftwing, it’s almost as if there’s another dimension.”

‘The truth that has been given to us’: Norway’s Bishop Varden on speaking about sexuality

(13-4-23) Bishop Erik Varden, OCSO, of Trondheim (Norway) discussed the Nordic bishops’ recent pastoral letter criticizing gender ideology.

Ethiopia - The Eparque of Adigrat: 15 parishes occupied by the armed forces

(13-4-23) Again this year, in Tigray, the people are experiencing Easter in very critical conditions. Despite the signing of the peace agreement concluded in South Africa between the government of Addis Ababa and the separatist organizations of the region in November 2022, the country is still in very precarious conditions.

“Following the calendar of the Ethiopian Coptic Orthodox Church, we will celebrate Easter on Sunday, April 16 - reports to Fides Tesfaselassie Medhin, bishop of the Catholic eparchy of Adigrat.

Unfortunately, the situation is still very critical because 15 parishes in the region are inaccessible due to the occupation by the armed forces”.

The bishop asks to continue to pray for the entire Ethiopian population and in particular for Tigray where the arrival of new internally displaced persons (IDPs) continues. According to the local press, 47,000 new displaced people have been registered in the Endabaguna refugee camp, near the town of Shire, in northwestern Tigray.

Vietnam - Faith and charity of Vietnamese Catholics at Easter time

(13-4-23) Easter time in Vietnamese Catholic communities is accompanied by fervent works of charity, the preaching of a proclamation of hope, and prayer in shrines.

In the archdiocese of Hue, groups of volunteers every Sunday collect used items donated by families, sort them, recycle them and sell them to traders: the proceeds make up a fund to help people in difficult situations or in need.

In the diocese of Ba Ria (South Vietnam), the faithful of associations and parishes devote much time and effort to charity work to help the poor and sick.

In Hanoi (North Vietnam), Archbishop Joseph Vu Van Thien visited and encouraged volunteers of the "Love meals", meals brought to patients of the Tan Trieu Cancer Hospital "to express solidarity with cancer patients who are undergoing treatment at the hospital". In a visit organized by Caritas of the diocese, priests, nuns, seminarians and religious also visited the Psychiatric Hospital and the Association for the Blind in the city of Hue, bringing comfort, smiles, solidarity, hope and a single message: the love and mercy of God that saves every person.



Brazil - "To evangelize, in a polarized society, means to be promoters of encounter, union and reconciliation"

(13-4-23) "We have decided that Mercy Sunday (2nd Sunday of Easter) of this year 2023 will also be a day of prayer to overcome polarization and promote reconciliation". This was announced by the Bishops of the Leste 1 Region of the Brazilian Episcopal Conference (CNBB) who, during the meeting of the Episcopal Council held in March, addressed the issue of the polarization of society, with its negative and divisive effects. "Polarization denies the value of diversity of opinion, fragments society and also hurts church communion. It also breaks fundamental bonds such as family unity and personal and social friendship".

The second Sunday of Easter, Mercy Sunday, reminds us of the gift of the Spirit for forgiveness (cf. Jn 20:22-23). "Reconciliation is a gift of the risen Christ. In a world torn by discord, the new presence of the Lord offers us the possibility of overcoming what separates us from God and from each other."

Court forbids coercive action, arrest of Indian bishop, priest

(13-4-23) The High Court in central Indian Madhya Pradesh state has ordered police to refrain from arresting a Catholic bishop and a priest and granted bail to a Catholic school principal, in two separate criminal cases.

The April 12 order of the principal bench of Madhya Pradesh High Court in Jabalpur comes in an appeal of Bishop Gerald Almeida of Jabalpur and Father Jagan Raj seeking to quash cases filed against them. The order said, "till the next date of hearing no coercive action shall be taken against the petitioners" and posted the case for hearing on April 24.

The police filed cases against the bishop and the priest on charges of cheating and abuse and neglect of children violating clauses of a child protection law. The earlier case against a Catholic principal fell flat. The court also directed the prosecution to submit the case diary and the inquiry report against the accused before the next hearing.

The case was registered on March 22 based on a complaint by an official from the education department under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act, 2021.

India's apex court asks if Mishra report can be used to decide on quota for 'Dalit' converts

(The Hindu, 13-4-23) The Supreme Court of India said on 12 April that a 2007 report of the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission for Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which recommended Scheduled Caste reservation for converts to Christianity and Islam, is not all that “perfunctory,” adding that the government need to “recheck” its stance on the report. A few months earlier, the Centre Government had discredited the report as “myopic,” and something prepared within the “four walls of a room.” Rejecting the Centre’s constitution of a new Commission, to prepare a report in two years, the apex court rekindled interest in the Mishra report, asking whether its empirical data could be used to determine if the exclusion of Dalit converts to Christianity and Islam from the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 was discriminatory and unconstitutional. The court fixed the hearing for July. Rejecting the Government stand, Justice Amanullah said that social stigma may continue to be attached to members of historically backward communities among Hindus who convert to Islam and Christianity to overcome caste oppression.



Another Christian gunned down in Pakistan

(13-4-23) Suspected Islamic extremists have gunned down yet another Christian in Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan, drawing concern and condemnation from Church leaders. Pervaiz Masih, a 55-year-old father of four, was killed on the morning of April 12 by gunmen who arrived on motorcycles and sprayed him with 13 bullets near the Jamia mosque in Turbat, police said.

Masih, a native of Punjab was engaged in sanitation work in Balochistan. His body is being brought to his family in the Punjab province on April 13.

His son Charles Masih termed the murder an ethnic killing. “He sent our youngest brother, also a sanitation worker, to celebrate Easter with us and stayed behind to collect his delayed salary. He was supposed to be with us during the upcoming Eid ul-Fitr holidays,” he told UCA News.

Timor-Leste bishop urges peace, stability ahead of polls

(13-4-23) A senior bishop in predominantly Catholic Timor-Leste has appealed to political leaders to promote healthy politics and maintain stability ahead of campaigning for a general election next month.

In a statement on April 11, ahead of the May 21 parliamentary elections, Bishop Dom Norberto do Amaral of Maliana, president of the bishops' conference in Timor-Leste, called on politicians to “take a role in maintaining peace and stability” rather than “attack each other or spread hatred in the presence of supporters.” The bishop also asked political leaders to tell the truth and implement political promises they make during the election campaign.

14-4-23

Over 50,000 massacred in Nigeria for being Christian in the last 14 years, report says

(14-4-23) According to the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law, which is based in Nigeria, 18,000 Christian churches and 2,200 Christian schools have been destroyed in Nigeria since 2015.

The nation of 225.1 million, the most populous in Africa and 6th most populous in the world, is 47% Muslim, 46% Christian (11% Catholic), and 7% ethnic religionist.

Pope tells religious superiors to keep bringing hope to our lost world

(14-4-23) On April 13, Pope Francis addressed participants in the General Assembly of the Union of Major Superiors of Italy (USMI).

During his address, the Pope made the following comment about the Synod: “The synodal journey is not about having answers and making decisions. The synodal journey is to walk, to listen – to listen! – to feel and move forward. The synodal journey is not a parliament; the synodal journey is not a

collection of opinions. The synodal journey is to place oneself in listening to life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is the protagonist of the Synod.”

The Christian presence in the Holy Land is in danger, Palestinian president warns

(14-4-23) Mahmoud Abbas, Palestinian president since 2005, paid tribute to the important role of Christianity in the Holy Land and warned that the Christian presence there is in danger. Abbas, 88, made his remarks in a lengthy interview with Roberto Cetera of *L'Osservatore Romano* for the 30th anniversary of the Oslo Accords.

“What distinguishes Christianity in Palestine is that Jesus is a son of this land, and here he was born, in the city of Bethlehem, in a humble cave, on which the Basilica of the Nativity was later built,” said Abbas, a Muslim who each year attends three Christmas Masses (of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Armenian Apostolic churches). He added: As the PNA [Palestinian National Authority] we are very attached to these places of worship, dear both to local Christians and to the many pilgrims who come from all over the world. We are aware that the land of Palestine is the land of holiness, from which Christianity originated and spread throughout the world.

Abbas also praised Pope Francis for his efforts for peace in the region. The Christian presence is in danger, and we fear that the Holy Land will lose its good Christian children, who are the salt of the earth here. In this context, we ask the churches and capitals of the world to stand in support of the Palestinian people to preserve the holy places of both the Christian and Islamic faiths.

Nicaragua expels 2 nuns in latest crackdown on Catholic Church and opposition

(14-4-23) The Dominican sisters, who administered a nursing home, were deported to their native Costa Rica. In addition, the Nicaraguan government on April 12 expropriated a Trappistine monastery for government use.

Chinese Archbishop Lin, head of divided archdiocese, dead at 88

(14-4-23) Archbishop Peter Lin Jiashan of Fuzhou, China, has died at the age of 88, after a long illness.

A leader of the “underground” Church, who had been imprisoned in labour camps during the 1980s, Archbishop Lin was chosen by the Holy See in 2016 to head the Fuzhou archdiocese. However, it was only in 2020, after the Vatican reached a secret accord with Beijing, that the government recognized his episcopal authority.

A large number of priests in the Fuzhou archdiocese have refused to accept civil registration and remain “underground,” so that Archbishop Lin presided over a divided clergy.



Catholic leaders in Bangladesh ask for easier missionary visas

(14-4-23) Under current regulations, prospective missionaries to Bangladesh must provide the government with information about personal bank accounts—but members of religious orders typically do not have personal accounts.

The South Asian nation of 166 million—the world’s 8th most populous—is 89% Muslim and 9% Hindu.

Theme announced for World Day of Grandparents and Elderly

(14-4-23) The theme of the 3rd World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, which will take place on July 23, is “His mercy is from age to age” (Luke 1:50).

Established by Pope Francis, the day takes place on the fourth Sunday in July, close to July 26, the memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne (the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary and grandparents of Jesus).

Indonesia - The proclamation of Easter to the indigenous peoples of Indonesian Papua

The proclamation of the Resurrection reached the indigenous peoples of Indonesian Papua (also called Irian Jaya) who celebrated the Passion of Christ and Easter thanks to the presence of a

missionary priest, Father Ferry Sutrisna Widjaja, who came from the Diocese of Bandung (in West Java province). On the remote highlands of Wamena, in Jayawijaya regency, part of Indonesian Papua, hundreds of indigenous people participated with devotion in the re-enactment of Christ's Stations of the Cross, with the ascent to Golgotha and crucifixion.



Last February the missionary had met Bishop Yanuarius Theofilus Matopai You, the first Papuan native to be elected Bishop, in the city of Jayapura, expressing his strong passion to evangelize and do good to the communities of local indigenous people.

So the missionary, a priest of Chinese origin, planned the trip to the Wamena Highlands during Holy Week and Easter time, and celebrated the Triduum with the Eucharist on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, the Easter Vigil. "I felt a call to share the gift of faith, hope and salvation given by Christ with these populations, simple people who live in harmony with nature, to get to know them better and be

close to them", he says. Speaking about the Hepuba parish church, based in Wamena, he notes, "The Easter celebrations were moving. There is deep faith, but also so much need to improve their living conditions. All Indonesian Catholics should show their solidarity with these native Papuans who are in need of development." Their desire is for "a peaceful life in society, without violence, so that they can live happily in their territory," the priest says. According to him, one of the key elements to bring this about is education: after meeting with several Papuan priests, the missionary visited the primary school in the remote area of Wamena (where children from different villages converge) noting that "it is in dire need of help, in terms of human and financial resources."

Colombia - The "District of Mercy": proclamation of the Gospel and promotion of human dignity in the centre of the capital

(14-4-23) "The District of Mercy" was founded in one of the most vulnerable areas of the Colombian capital, promoted and supported by the Catholic Church, in a coordinated work between the Archdiocese and different religious communities, paying attention to children, youth, adults and the elderly, who face complex social realities.

The District, whose central axis of operations is the neighborhood of Las Cruces, in the south-eastern area of Bogotá, offers shelter, material assistance in response to basic needs; spiritual guidance; therapeutic paths; support for the reestablishment of rights; and scholastic, human and Christian formation.

According to information released by the Colombian Bishops' Conference, among the religious communities involved in this work is the Congregation of the Servants of Christ the Priest, who provide assistance to the elderly, children and adolescents, through three centres. The "Hogar Sagrada Familia" is home to 95 girls between the ages of 7 and 21, whose rights have been violated, who are cared for by an interdisciplinary team of 35 professionals. The "Hogar Clarita Santos" cares for 49 children with cognitive, multiple and sensory disabilities. From 6 a.m. until 4 p.m., physical and therapeutic activities are carried out, and parents are also guided in paths of co-responsibility in the care of these children.

A short distance away is the "Casa della Speranza Fratel Ettore" which welcomes women relatives of people hospitalized in the area or who need medical care and have no accommodation. This work is attended by the Little Sisters Apostles of the Redemption. There is also the "Pastoral center for the care of the elderly Fratel Ettore", which provides housing for 15 grandmothers in vulnerable or abandoned situations. This pastoral center also provides 100 lunches to homeless people every Saturday; and 200 breakfasts for vulnerable people on Sundays.

In the area, as a pillar of evangelization and pastoral accompaniment, stands the parish of Nuestra Señora del Carmen - Las Cruces, erected in 1902. Parallel to the proclamation of the Gospel, the priests and evangelization animators, together with people of good will, are committed to the promotion of human dignity, responding to the concrete needs of people.

A few blocks to the north-east, stands another parish, dedicated to Nuestra Señora de Belén, which is entrusted to the Montfort Missionaries and carries out various social programs to benefit the neediest population. There is a soup kitchen for the elderly and homeless that has been operating every Saturday for more than 20 years, where more than 200 lunches are served, and recreation and health days are also held, led by a group of lay people.

There are also other initiatives carried out by various religious institutes.

French Polynesia - First gathering for a group of teenagers ready for Confirmation through 4 islets in the archipelago of the Leeward Islands

(14-4-23) For the first time in the Leeward Islands, the Raromatai, a gathering was held that brought together in Taha'a, one of the 4 that welcomed the other three: Huahine, Raiatea and Bora Bora, all the young people from the islands who are preparing for their Confirmation. "Ninety teenagers across 4 islets is an achievement, if one only thinks how sparse the all-encompassing number of Catholic Christians is," Fr. Sandro Lafranconi told Fides about the Easter celebrations that just ended.

"Together, since Easter afternoon, we experienced three intense days of preparation for Confirmation," wrote the priest from the Society for African Missions.

"On the night between Wednesday and Thursday, the huge ferry left Taha'a to bring home the young people of Raiatea and Huahine. Those of Bora Bora waited until Friday morning. The catechists are a small group without sufficient knowledge," says the missionary.



Militants claim killing 'Pakistani spy' Christian

(14-4-23) A militant group in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province has claimed responsibility for shooting down a Christian and termed him a police spy against them.

Baloch Liberation Army, an ethnic-nationalist militant group, in a statement on April 13 said they killed 55-year-old Pervaiz Masih because he was "spying for Pakistani intelligence agencies posing as a government employee."

Masih, a father of four from Punjab province, had been working as a sweeper for the state-run Irrigation Department and Turbat Municipal Corporation.

He was shot dead by two men on a motorcycle near Turbat's Jamia mosque on April 12. Masih was buried the next day in his hometown in Okara, Punjab.

Christian Chinese lawyer appeals 'subversion' conviction

(14-4-23) A Christian human rights lawyer in China has appealed against a five-year prison sentence for subversion, a rights group says.

Qin Yongpei from the Guangxi region in southern China was detained for more than three years and sentenced to five years by the Nanning City Intermediate People's Court of Guangxi, ChinaAid reported on April 13.

Qin is the founder and director of the Guangxi Baijuming Law Firm and worked as a human rights lawyer for about a decade, according to Front Line Defenders rights group. Qin is known for his critical analysis and comments on state policies and actions including abuse of power by officials and human rights violations.

Indian president concerned over attacks on Christians

(14-4-23) Indian President Droupadi Murmu has expressed concern over reports of increasing persecution of Christians and assured community leaders of taking action as the highest Constitutional authority in the country.

Murmu received a delegation of Christian leaders at Rashtrapati Bhawan, her official residence, in New Delhi on April 13. Led by Archbishop Anil Joseph Couto of Delhi, it comprised Methodist Bishop

Subodh Mondal, Protestant Bishop Paul Swarup of the Church of North India, and Christian activists Michael Williams and Tehmina Arora.



During the half-an-hour meeting, the president was briefed about the steep increase in the incidents of violence against Christians, especially in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Murmu said she had read reports about the targeting of Christians, however, she believed that these violent attacks were being perpetrated by only a handful of people and stressed that the secular fabric of the nation was still vibrant.

The United Christian Forum (UCF), a group that monitors atrocities against Christians in India, has recorded 598 violent incidents against Christians in 2022 from 21 states

among the 28 states and 8 federally ruled territories in the country, said the memorandum presented to the president.

In the first three months of 2023, UCF has reported 187 verified incidents of faith-based violence against Christians. The incidents of violence include intimidation, mob violence, brutal assault, vandalism of sacred places of worship, sexual violence, closure of churches, social ostracization, denial of burial for the departed, and false reports under anti-conversion laws.

The states of particular concern are Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, and Jharkhand. The memorandum highlighted the recent series of attacks in the tribal-dominated southern region of Bastar in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh, against tribal Christians over allegations of religious conversions.

The memorandum urged the federal and state governments to protect the Constitutional rights of the Christian community, its freedom to practice and propagate the faith, and to live with dignity and without threat to lives and property. It further called to strengthen human rights monitoring mechanisms and set up national and state redressal mechanisms to address targeted violence against minorities. The delegations also sought speedy closure of false cases against Christians, reconstruction of illegally demolished churches across the country, strict action against vigilante mobs, and compensation for individuals and institutions who are falsely targeted for their religious identity.

Murmu gave a patient hearing to the delegation and applauded the Christian community's service in the area of healthcare and education. She fondly recalled her time volunteering with nuns in her home state of Odisha in eastern India and also remembered the tragic loss of Graham Staines, an Australian missionary who was brutally murdered along with his two young sons in 1999. The president said the Staines were her neighbours and expressed regret in her inability at the time to avert the tragic loss.

Christians protest against attacks in India

(14-4-23) After a massive protest march in the national capital New Delhi in February, thousands of Christians were joined by Hindus and Muslims on April 12 in India's financial capital Mumbai to protest against increasing violence against Christians and their places of worship.

The protest rally of 7,000-8,000 people comprising a federation of 80 Christian NGOs under the banner of Samast Christi Samaj (All Christian Community) submitted a memorandum, listing 20 demands, to Eknath Shinde, chief minister of Maharashtra state, of which Mumbai is the capital.

"There are continued waves of hate speech and targeted violence against religious leaders, desecration of places of worship, disruption of prayer services and restrictions on religious gatherings, and false accusations of forced and fraudulent religious conversions," the memorandum said.

"We want to end the escalation of violence and attacks against the peace-loving Christian community by those using the unfounded accusation of conversion as an excuse," Dolphy D'Souza, Samast Christi Samaj spokesperson, told UCA News.

Indian Supreme Court: Basis of Karnataka State's order to scrap of 4% Muslim quota shaky

(TOI, 14-4-23) The supreme court (SC) of India shredded on 13 April 2023 Karnataka government's controversial March 27 decision ending 4% Muslim quota in the state and said the 'The Order appears to be based on absolutely fallacious assumptions, that is our prima facie view. The foundation of the order is shaky. The order could not have been passed based on an interim report of the commission. The state could have waited till a final report.'

Sending that the court was inclined to stay the order, the Karnataka government gave an undertaking that the decision would not be implemented till 17 April. The matter will be heard on 18 April. The bench of the SC said, "On the basis of the documents and materials produced before us, it appears that Muslims were backward and then suddenly it has changed."

15-4-23

Myanmar - Catholics invoke Divine mercy, "in a mixture of joy and sorrow"

(15-4-23) "We live in the midst of a mixture of joy and sorrow. We were able to celebrate Easter in the city, and this is a source of joy, but with concern and fear. Only few of the faithful have the opportunity or the courage to come to churches because of the unstable situation. In some churches, in the villages outside the city of Pekhon, Easter was not celebrated: liturgical celebrations were not held due to violence and unsafe conditions. There are still many displaced Catholics, who take refuge in the city, in villages not affected by the clashes or in the jungle, in places they consider safer. The political and social situation continues to be critical. We are in God's hands. We pray every day for the future of our Myanmar people and invoke Divine mercy," is the heartfelt testimony given to Fides by Father Aniceto Dereh Day, parish priest of the Sacred Heart Cathedral and Vicar General of the diocese of Pekhon. His diocese, in eastern Myanmar, encompasses a mostly hilly and mountainous territory that, at the civil level, is partly in the State of Shan and partly in the State of Kayah. Along with the dioceses of Loikaw, Hakha, Kalay and Mandalay, the Pekhon diocese, home to 55,000 Catholics, is among the territories most severely affected by the ongoing civil conflict in Myanmar.



Middle East - "Ecumenical Day for the Abducted" promoted ten years after the kidnapping of the two Metropolitan Bishops of Aleppo

(15-4-23) As of next year, Churches in the Middle East will celebrate the "Ecumenical Day for the Abducted and the Forcibly Absented" every April 22. The initiative, promoted by the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), will be presented on Monday, April 24, in the context of a commemorative seminar promoted on the tenth anniversary of the kidnapping of the two Metropolitans of Aleppo, Greek Orthodox Boulos Yazigi and Syriac Orthodox Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, who mysteriously disappeared on April 22, 2013.

The two metropolitan bishops of Aleppo were kidnapped in the area between the Syrian metropolis and the border with Turkey. The car in which the two Bishops were traveling was blocked by the group of kidnapers and the driver - the Latin-rite Catholic Fatha' Allah Kabboud, father of three children - who was shot in the head. The kidnapping was not claimed by any group, and since then no certain and verified details have emerged regarding the reasons for the kidnapping and the fate of the two clergymen.

16-4-23

Pope at Regina Coeli: Seek the Risen One in the community

(16-4-23) There's more to the Apostle St Thomas than his famous doubts about Jesus' Resurrection, Pope Francis said during the Regina Coeli on Divine Mercy Sunday.

Referring to the Gospel of the day he noted that "Thomas was not the only one who struggled to believe." But unlike his fellow Apostles, who closed themselves inside the Upper Room, Thomas "showed he was courageous," he "went out, running the risk that someone might recognize, report, or arrest him."

When the other Apostles told Thomas that Jesus had appeared to them, he struggled to believe them, saying he would believe only when he could see and touch the wounds of Jesus.

Thomas, the Pope said, "wants an extraordinary sign – to touch the wounds. Jesus shows them to him, but *in an ordinary way*, coming in front of everyone, in the community." It is in the presence of the community that Jesus shows the Apostles His wounds, "the proof of his love, the ever-open channels of His mercy."

Pope Francis explained that we, like Thomas, are invited to "seek the Risen One" not in "some spectacular or amazing religious manifestation, only at the emotional or sensational level," but within the community of believers, the Church. "Despite all its limitations and failures, which are our own limitations and failures, our Mother Church is the Body of Christ," the Pope said. "And it is there, in the Body of Christ, that the greatest signs of His love can be found, impressed, now and forever."

"Are we willing to open our arms to those who are wounded by life, excluding no one from God's mercy, but welcoming everyone – each person like a brother, like a sister," the Pope asked.

An appeal to warring parties in Sudan to lay down arms and resume dialogue



(16-4-23) Pope Francis expressed his concern for the eruption of violence in Sudan, where scores of people have been killed and wounded as the Sudanese military and a paramilitary group battle for control of the nation for a second.

Speaking during the Regina Coeli in St Peter's Square, the Pope said he is following events taking place in Khartoum and elsewhere in the Horn of Africa nation "with concern".

He called for prayers that "arms may be laid down and that dialogue may prevail, so that together, they are able to return to the path of peace and concord."

Fighting reportedly continues in the Sudanese capital and in other areas amid reports that dozens of civilians have been killed in the clashes, many more injured. But the clashing parties are unwilling to end hostilities despite mounting diplomatic pressure to cease fire.

Pope: Wars continue to sow death in stark contrast with the Easter message

(16-4-23) Pope Francis sent greetings and expressed closeness to Eastern Christians who are celebrating Easter at a time when so many wars continue to sow death. He turns his thoughts in particular to Russians and Ukrainians, with prayers that the Lord may help them to make peace.



Pope Francis' words came during the Regina Coeli on Sunday, as Eastern Christian churches in many nations celebrate their Easter on April 16 this year, in accordance with the Julian calendar. "Sadly," the Pope continued, "In stark contrast to the Easter message, wars continue, and are continuing to sow death in horrific ways."
