



POPE FRANCIS

Address to Diplomatic Corps 2014

SALA REGIA, 13 JANUARY 2014

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now a long-established tradition that at the beginning of each new year the Pope meets the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See to offer his greetings and good wishes, and to share some reflections close to his heart as a pastor concerned for the joys and sufferings of humanity. Today's meeting, therefore, is a source of great joy. It allows me to extend to you and your families, and to the civil authorities and the peoples whom you represent, my heartfelt best wishes for a year filled with blessings and peace.

Before all else, I thank your Dean, Jean-Claude Michel, who has spoken in your name of the affection and esteem which binds your nations to the Apostolic See. I am happy to see you here in such great numbers, after having met you for the first time just a few days after my election. In the meantime, many new Ambassadors have taken up their duties and I welcome them once again. Among those who have left us, I cannot fail to mention, as your Dean has already done, the late Ambassador Alejandro Valladares Lanza, for many years the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, whom the Lord called to himself several months ago.

The year just ended was particularly eventful, not only in the life of the Church but also in the context of the relations which the Holy See maintains with states and international organizations. I recall in particular the establishment of diplomatic relations with South Sudan, the signing of basic or specific accords with Cape Verde, Hungary and Chad, and the ratification of the accord with Equatorial Guinea signed in 2012. On the regional level too, the presence of the Holy See has expanded, both in Central America, where it became an Extra-Regional Observer to the Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana, and in Africa, with its accreditation as the first Permanent Observer to the Economic Community of West African States.

In my Message for the World Day of Peace, dedicated to fraternity as the foundation and pathway to peace, I observed that "fraternity is generally first learned within the family...",[1] for the family "by its vocation... is meant to spread its love to the world around it"[2] and to contribute to the growth of that spirit of service and sharing which builds peace.[3] This is the message of the Crib, where we see the Holy Family, not alone and isolated from the world, but surrounded by shepherds and the Magi, that is by an open community in which there is room for everyone, poor and rich alike, those near and those afar. In this way we can appreciate the insistence of my beloved predecessor Benedict XVI that "the language of the family is a language of peace".[4]

Sadly, this is often not the case, as the number of broken and troubled families is on the rise, not simply because of the weakening sense of belonging so typical of today's world, but also because of the adverse conditions in which many families are forced to live, even to the point where they lack basic means of subsistence. There is a need for suitable policies aimed at supporting, assisting and strengthening the family!

It also happens that the elderly are looked upon as a burden, while young people lack clear prospects for their lives. Yet the elderly and the young are the hope of humanity. The elderly bring with them wisdom born of experience; the young open us to the future and prevent us from becoming self-absorbed.[5] It is prudent to keep the elderly from being ostracized from the life of society, so as to preserve the living memory of each people. It is likewise important to invest in the young through suitable initiatives which can help them to find employment and establish homes. We must not stifle their enthusiasm! I vividly recall my experience at the Twenty-Eighth World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro. I met so many happy young people! What great hope and expectation is present in their eyes and in their prayers! What a great thirst for life and a desire for openness to others! Being closed and isolated always makes for a stifling, heavy atmosphere which sooner or later ends

up creating sadness and oppression. What is needed instead is a shared commitment to favouring a culture of encounter, for only those able to reach out to others are capable of bearing fruit, creating bonds of communion, radiating joy and being peacemakers.

The scenes of destruction and death which we have witnessed in the past year confirm all this – if ever we needed such confirmation. How much pain and desperation are caused by self-centredness which gradually takes the form of envy, selfishness, competition and the thirst for power and money! At times it seems that these realities are destined to have the upper hand. Christmas, on the other hand, inspires in us Christians the certainty that the final, definitive word belongs to the Prince of Peace, who changes “swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks” (cf. Is 2:4), transforming selfishness into self-giving and revenge into forgiveness.

It is with this confidence that I wish to look to the year ahead. I continue to be hopeful that the conflict in Syria will finally come to an end. Concern for that beloved people, and a desire to avert the worsening of violence, moved me last September to call for a day of fasting and prayer. Through you I heartily thank all those in your countries – public authorities and people of good will – who joined in this initiative. What is presently needed is a renewed political will to end the conflict. In this regard, I express my hope that the Geneva 2 Conference, to be held on 22 January, will mark the beginning of the desired peace process. At the same time, full respect for humanitarian law remains essential. It is unacceptable that unarmed civilians, especially children, become targets. I also encourage all parties to promote and ensure in every way possible the provision of urgently-needed aid to much of the population, without overlooking the praiseworthy effort of those countries – especially Lebanon and Jordan – which have generously welcomed to their territory numerous refugees from Syria.

Remaining in the Middle East, I note with concern the tensions affecting the region in various ways. I am particularly concerned by the ongoing political problems in Lebanon, where a climate of renewed cooperation between the different components of civil society and the political powers is essential for avoiding the further hostilities which would undermine the stability of the country. I think too of Egypt, with its need to regain social harmony, and Iraq, which struggles to attain the peace and stability for which it hopes. At the same time, I note with satisfaction the significant progress made in the dialogue between Iran and the Group of 5+1 on the nuclear issue.

Everywhere, the way to resolve open questions must be that of diplomacy and dialogue. This is the royal road already indicated with utter clarity by Pope Benedict XV when he urged the leaders of the European nations to make “the moral force of law” prevail over the “material force of arms” in order to end that “needless carnage”[6] which was the First World War, whose centenary occurs this year. What is needed is courage “to go beyond the surface of the conflict”[7] and to consider others in their deepest dignity, so that unity will prevail over conflict and it will be “possible to build communion amid disagreement”. [8] In this regard, the resumption of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians is a positive sign, and I express my hope that both parties will resolve, with the support of the international community, to take courageous decisions aimed at finding a just and lasting solution to a conflict which urgently needs to end. I myself intend to make a pilgrimage of peace to the Holy Land in the course of this year. The exodus of Christians from the Middle East and North Africa continues to be a source of concern. They want to continue to be a part of the social, political and cultural life of countries which they helped to build, and they desire to contribute to the common good of societies where they wish to be fully accepted as agents of peace and reconciliation.

In other parts of Africa as well, Christians are called to give witness to God’s love and mercy. We must never cease to do good, even when it is difficult and demanding, and when we endure acts of intolerance if not genuine persecution. In vast areas of Nigeria violence persists, and much innocent blood continues to be spilt. I think above all of the Central African Republic, where much suffering has been caused as a result of the country’s tensions, which have frequently led to devastation and death. As I assure you of my prayers for the victims and the many refugees, forced to live in dire poverty, I express my hope that the concern of the international community will help to bring an end to violence, a return to the rule of law and guaranteed access to humanitarian aid, also in the remotest parts of the country. For her part, the Catholic Church will continue to assure her presence and cooperation, working generously to help people in every possible way and, above all, to rebuild a climate of reconciliation and of peace among all groups in society. Reconciliation and peace are likewise fundamental priorities in other parts of Africa. I think in particular of Mali, where we nonetheless note

the promising restoration of the country's democratic structures, and of South Sudan, where, on the contrary, political instability has lately led to many deaths and a new humanitarian crisis.

The Holy See is also closely following events in Asia, where the Church desires to share the joys and hopes of all the peoples of that vast and noble continent. On this, the fiftieth anniversary of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea, I wish to implore from God the gift of reconciliation on the peninsula, and I trust that, for the good of all the Korean people, the interested parties will tirelessly seek out points of agreement and possible solutions. Asia, in fact, has a long history of peaceful coexistence between its different civil, ethnic and religious groups. Such reciprocal respect needs to be encouraged, especially given certain troubling signs that it is weakening, particularly where growing attitudes of prejudice, for allegedly religious reasons, are tending to deprive Christians of their liberties and to jeopardize civil coexistence. The Holy See looks, instead, with lively hope to the signs of openness coming from countries of great religious and cultural traditions, with whom it wishes to cooperate in the pursuit of the common good.

Peace is also threatened by every denial of human dignity, firstly the lack of access to adequate nutrition. We cannot be indifferent to those suffering from hunger, especially children, when we think of how much food is wasted every day in many parts of the world immersed in what I have often termed “the throwaway culture”. Unfortunately, what is thrown away is not only food and dispensable objects, but often human beings themselves, who are discarded as “unnecessary”. For example, it is frightful even to think there are children, victims of abortion, who will never see the light of day; children being used as soldiers, abused and killed in armed conflicts; and children being bought and sold in that terrible form of modern slavery which is human trafficking, which is a crime against humanity.

Nor can we be unmoved by the tragedies which have forced so many people to flee from famine, violence and oppression, particularly in the Horn of Africa and in the Great Lakes Region. Many of these are living as fugitives or refugees in camps where they are no longer seen as persons but as nameless statistics. Others, in the hope of a better life, have undertaken perilous journeys which not infrequently end in tragedy. I think in particular of the many migrants from Latin America bound for the United States, but above all of all those from Africa and the Middle East who seek refuge in Europe.

Still vivid in my memory is the brief visit I made to Lampedusa last July, to pray for the numerous victims of the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. Sadly, there is a general indifference in the face of these tragedies, which is a dramatic sign of the loss of that “sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters”,^[9] on which every civil society is based. On that occasion I was also able to observe the hospitality and dedication shown by so many people. It is my hope that the Italian people, whom I regard with affection, not least for the common roots which unite us, will renew their praiseworthy commitment of solidarity towards the weakest and most vulnerable, and, with generous and coordinated efforts by citizens and institutions, overcome present difficulties and regain their long-standing climate of constructive social creativity.

Finally, I wish to mention another threat to peace, which arises from the greedy exploitation of environmental resources. Even if “nature is at our disposition”,^[10] all too often we do not “respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations”.^[11] Here too what is crucial is responsibility on the part of all in pursuing, in a spirit of fraternity, policies respectful of this earth which is our common home. I recall a popular saying: “God always forgives, we sometimes forgive, but when nature – creation – is mistreated, she never forgives!”. We have also witnessed the devastating effects of several recent natural disasters. In particular, I would mention once more the numerous victims and the great devastation caused in the Philippines and other countries of Southeast Asia as a result of typhoon Haiyan.

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Pope Paul VI noted that peace “is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day towards the establishment of an order willed by God, with a more perfect justice among men and women”.^[12] This is the spirit which guides the Church's activity throughout the world, carried out by priests, missionaries and lay faithful who with great dedication

give freely of themselves, not least in a variety of educational, healthcare and social welfare institutions, in service to the poor, the sick, orphans and all those in need of help and comfort. On the basis of this “loving attentiveness”,^[13] the Church cooperates with all institutions concerned for the good of individuals and communities.

At the beginning of this new year, then, I assure you once more of the readiness of the Holy See, and of the Secretariat of State in particular, to cooperate with your countries in fostering those bonds of fraternity which are a reflection of God’s love and the basis of concord and peace. Upon you, your families and the peoples you represent, may the Lord’s blessings descend in abundance. Thank you.

Pope Francis

[1] Message for the 2014 World Day of Peace (8 December 2013), 1.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Cf. *ibid.*, 10.

[4] BENEDICT XVI, Message for the 2008 World Day of Peace (8 December 2007), 3: AAS 100 (2008), 39

[5] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 108.

[6] Cf. BENEDICT XV, Letter to the Leaders of the Peoples at War (1 August 1917): AAS 9 (1917), 421-423.

[7] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 228.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Homily at Mass in Lampedusa, 8 July 2013.

[10] Message for the 2014 World Day of Peace (8 December 2013), 9.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* (26 March 1967), 76: AAS 59 (1967), 294-295.

[13] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 199.