

**ADDRESS OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND
CRADLING CHRISTIANITY DINNER
COLUMBUS, OHIO – SEPTEMBER 12, 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am grateful to be with you as together we work to “cradle Christianity” in the Holy Land: to be sure that Christians can continue to live in that land that the Lord made holy by his life, death, and resurrection. Thank you, Bishop Fernandes, for your invitation to speak tonight. Blessings to the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land, and thank you to everyone who makes this work possible. Be assured of the spiritual closeness of Pope Francis.

War in the Holy Land

On the eve of last Easter, Pope Francis wrote to the Catholics of the Holy Land who were suffering the ravages of war. He acknowledged that their Easter was “so overshadowed by the Passion and, as yet, so little by the Resurrection”.¹ Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and Palestine, has recently described the extreme degradation of the situation. He said: “Talking about friendship between Israelis and Palestinians right now is a bit like beating the air,” and that “The language of mutual rejection has become a daily matter that is breathed in by the media, and it is something truly dramatic.” He describes a situation that “has deteriorated and degenerated, not only within the territories but also in the general culture, a culture of violence as the only form of language”.²

In the midst of this catastrophe, the message that the Cardinal brings is the true message of the Gospel for times like these: the message of hope. “Hope does not mean that things are about to end,” he says. “The short-term outlook is not

¹ Pope Francis, Letter to the Catholics of the Holy Land, Holy Week 2024.

² Interview with Alessandro Banfi, *Le Grandi Interviste* at The Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples, Rimini, Italy, 20 August 2024.

positive. Hope is an inner attitude that enables one to see with the eyes of the Spirit what human eyes do not see.” He goes on: “Peace is a culture, not something one must do; it is politics, it is education, it is the commitment of the media, it is working in all aspects, in a globalized world where no one is an island. Peace is a culture.”³

“Fratelli Tutti”

The situation in Israel and Palestine causes grief to us all, because, as St. Paul said: “If one part [of the body] suffers, all the parts suffer with it.”⁴ But this is precisely where our Christian faith and witness are needed. Since we are followers of the Savior of mankind who was crucified and is risen, we have a proclamation that remains unique in the history of the world, and unique among all religions. Hatred, war, suffering, and death are not the final answer. Peace and life can still emerge from these things, because Christ has risen from the dead.

But in the face of such an enormous calamity as we see occurring in the Holy Land, what can we do? In a recent message on behalf of Pope Francis that was delivered to the *Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples* in Rimini, Italy, the Holy See’s Secretary of State wrote the following:

“Faced with the temptation of discouragement, the complexity of the current crisis and, in particular, the challenge of a seemingly impossible peace, the Holy Father urges everyone to become responsible agents of change, actively collaborating in the Church’s mission, to give life together to places where Christ’s presence can be seen and touched. This joint commitment can give rise to a new world, where the love that was manifested to us in Christ may finally triumph, and the entire planet may become a temple of fraternity.”⁵

Again: “the Holy Father urges everyone to become responsible agents of change, actively collaborating in the Church’s mission.” This, then, is something to which we can all contribute. It involves how we think, and how we act, in our

³ Interview with Vatican Media, Rimini, Italy, 20 August 2024.

⁴ *1 Corinthians* 12:26.

⁵ Message of His Holiness Pope Francis Signed by the Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, to Mark the XLV Edition of the Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples, 19 July 2024.

ordinary daily lives. The solution is to live the message of Christ. What message is this? It is the message that Pope Francis made the title of his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, which means: “brothers and sisters all”. We are called to love others, and to make peace with others, not because they share our views, are of the same culture as we are, nor because they profess the same religion. We love others because they are members of the same human family, created and loved by the same God.

Models for Universal Fraternity: Francis, Teresa, the Good Samaritan

In the history of the saints, we have extraordinary models for this way of loving. One of them is the patron of this Foundation and the namesake of the Holy Father: St. Francis of Assisi. Saint Francis was a man who saw God’s goodness in every creature, and who sowed fraternity among all people, no matter what social class, religion, or tribe they belonged to. During a time when Christians were fighting Crusades for control of the Holy Land, St. Francis made a difficult journey to Egypt in order to encounter the Muslim Sultan. He did so, not to confront him with harsh words let alone weapons, but to speak the truth in love, in an effort to build peace on the basis of their shared humanity.

Another example of Christ’s universal love is the woman whose feast day we celebrated last week: St. Teresa of Calcutta. When Christ called out to her from the poorest of the poor – “I thirst” – it did not matter whether the person was Christian or not. Mother Teresa encountered Christ in each person whom she served. In turn, the people whom she served encountered Christ in her. The dialogue between them was not always explicitly religious. At times no words were needed. But her actions always spoke the universal language of love.

Both Francis and Teresa acted in the way they did because of the lesson of the Good Samaritan. When a man had been beaten and left for dead on the side of the road, more than one traveler excused himself from the act of caring for the man. The Samaritan was the first one to make himself neighbor to the man.⁶

⁶ Cf. *Luke* 10:30-37.

The Difference that Christians Make

The Good Samaritan, of course, points us to Jesus. And if this is how Jesus loves, then so must we. When it comes to people at war, we Christians are the ones who must introduce a new element. This is one of the reasons that the presence of Christians in the Holy Land is so important. Here is what Cardinal Pizzabella said:

“The presence of Christians in the Holy Land neutralizes the political-religious element, if I can put it that way. An encounter between Jews and Muslims, between Israelis and Palestinians...at this moment is almost impossible because it immediately becomes political. The presence of Christians immediately gives the encounter a completely different vision and aspect. Let’s say that the presence of Christians brings into that tangle...an element of difference that forces you to think outside the commonplaces and pre-written narratives.”⁷

What, then, about us Christians who do not live in the Holy Land, but who want to do what we can to help? The Cardinal also addressed that question. He commented:

“I must say that in recent months I have seen incredible solidarity, not only in practical terms and financial support but also in attention, prayer, and closeness. When we asked our diocese, our people, to pray for peace, practically the whole world joined us. This is a very beautiful sign, a great consolation.”⁸

With these words, Cardinal Pizzaballa affirms that your involvement with the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land – your spiritual and material support – is a work of peace. It has real effects in the hearts and minds of those who are enduring a horrific war. Together with the whole Church, the charity of your prayers and gifts is a way of saying “No” to war and to the culture of violence, while saying “Yes” to social friendship and fraternity.

⁷ *Le Grandi Interviste*

⁸ *Ibid.*

“The Renewal of Your Mind”

We need to perform prayers and actions to serve Christ’s mission, of course. But undergirding that outward work, it is important that we experience what St. Paul calls a “renewal of your mind” – an inward conversion, at the level of our attitude and way of thinking. Let’s hear what Paul says in his *Letter to the Romans*:

“[Brothers and sisters:] Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the *renewal of your mind*, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”⁹

In reaction to the problems which the world faces – from war to political hatred to forced migration – there are always many voices in “this age” telling us what to think about those problems. So often, these voices are speaking from a mentality of political rivalry, prejudice, and condemnation. And that is why we need our own mentality to be renewed in accordance with what God has revealed and what the Church teaches. Jesus said: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”¹⁰

What, then, does the Church say about peace, and about war? A review of the statements by the Popes of the 20th century reveals a strong and consistent answer.

Papal Teachings on War and Peace

In 1941, in the midst of the Second World War, Pope Pius XII was already giving this warning: “The calamity of a world war, with the economic and social ruin and the moral excesses and dissolution that accompany it, must not on any account be permitted to engulf the human race for a third time.”¹¹ A little more than 80 years later, we are witnessing what Pope Francis calls “a third world war fought piecemeal”.¹²

⁹ *Romans* 12:2, emphasis added.

¹⁰ *Matthew* 5:9.

¹¹ Pope Pius XII, Radio Message for Christmas (24 December 1941), 4.

¹² Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, 8 January 2024.

Pope John XXIII advocated strongly for peace, saying that the process of disarmament must “reach men’s very souls”, and that “Everyone must sincerely cooperate in the effort to banish fear and the anxious expectation of war from men’s minds.”¹³

Pope Paul VI memorably said to the United Nations in 1965: “War no more!” And in his 1969 message for the World Day of Peace, calling peace a “duty”, he said:

“The necessity of war could be justified only in exceptional and deplorable conditions of fact and law, which should never be verified in modern world society. ... Understanding, negotiations, arbitration, and not outrage, blood and slavery, must intervene in the difficult relationships between men. ... Peace must be willed. Peace must be loved. Peace must be produced. It must be a moral consequence; it must spring up from free and generous spirits.”¹⁴

In his brief pontificate, Pope John Paul I also repeated the Church’s call for peace, saying in one of his Angelus addresses: “All men are hungry and thirsty for peace, especially the poor, who pay more and suffer more in troubled times and in wars.”¹⁵

Pope John Paul II said to the Diplomatic Corps in 2003:

“*NO TO WAR*’! War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity. International law, honest dialogue, solidarity between States, the noble exercise of diplomacy: these are methods worthy of individuals and nations in resolving their differences.”¹⁶

Pope Benedict XVI furthered the Church’s call for peace, such as in an Angelus address in 2007, when he said:

“War, with its aftermath of bereavement and destruction, has always been deemed a disaster in opposition to the plan of God, who created

¹³ Pope St. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris* On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty (11 April 1963), 113.

¹⁴ Pope St. Paul VI, Message for the Celebration of the Day of Peace, 1 January 1969.

¹⁵ Pope Bl. John Paul I, Angelus Address, 10 September 1978.

¹⁶ Pope St. John Paul II, Address to the Diplomatic Corps, 13 January 2003, 4.

all things for existence and particularly wants to make the human race one family.”¹⁷

To this long tradition of papal calls for peace and the denunciation of war, Pope Francis continues to add his own appeals. While repeatedly calling for dialogue to replace the armed conflicts in the Holy Land, Ukraine, and elsewhere, the Holy Father has also challenged us – as a logical progression from what his predecessors have said – to re-think the concept of a “just war”, especially in this age of nuclear weapons, the use and possession of which he has called immoral.¹⁸

The point of recalling these papal teachings is this. Part of “renewing our minds”, as St. Paul urges, is to receive the fullness of the Church’s teachings, including her teachings on war and peace, which are not always sufficiently highlighted, but which are a necessary part of the Gospel of life. To be “responsible agents of change, actively collaborating in the Church’s mission”, as Pope Francis has called us to be, means that we must challenge the logic of war and be advocates of peace.

Conclusion

Saint Francis of Assisi... Mother Teresa of Calcutta... The Good Samaritan... and Jesus himself: Their way of confronting a world filled with indifference, prejudice, and hatred was to encounter others with tenderness. To receive the other person, and then to give. What they gave was their time, and what material resources they had to offer; but at the deepest level, they gave the gift of themselves. This, my brothers and sisters, is something that each of us can do. Each of us can be open to receiving others. And each of us can give to the other our time, yes, and our material resources. But even more importantly, we can give to others the gift of ourselves. And in this way, we can be a part of Christ’s mission of fraternity and peace.

¹⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus Address, 22 July 2007.

¹⁸ Cf. Interview with *Télam* published by Vatican News, 1 July 2022.