

**CHRISTMAS MESSAGE
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APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
ETERNAL WORD TELEVISION NETWORK
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My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the personal representative of the Holy Father in the United States, in his name, I wish you and your families a blessed and peace-filled Christmas. I express to you the personal closeness and spiritual affection of Pope Francis, assuring you of his constant prayers during this holy season.

St. Luke tells us that the shepherds on the night of Christ's birth received from the heavenly chorus the message of 'peace' toward people of good will (*Lk 2,14*). We know that in our world today, not all have welcomed this message of peace. We think of the many areas of our world where people live without peace; indeed, where they are forced to endure conflict and even warfare. At this moment, our minds turn in particular to the Ukrainian people, who suffer the horrors of warfare, as they struggle for survival.

Recently His Holiness wrote an open letter to the people of the Ukraine in preparation for this Advent season. He expressed his deep sorrow for the great suffering these people are enduring through separation, alienation, rejection, and even death itself. In his heartfelt message Pope Francis wrote: "I would like to return with you to Bethlehem, to the trials that the Holy Family had to face on that night that seemed only cold and dark. Instead light came: not from men, but from God; not from earth, but from Heaven."

Where are we in the midst of all this conflict and sorrow? How has this terrible war in the Ukraine affected our personal lives? How can our own experiences of darkness at the present moment lead to a greater conversion of our own hearts? It all begins by accepting in a more profound way the coming of Jesus in human flesh into our daily lives. It manifests itself by our encounter with the Word of God, the Kerygma, the Good News that reveals itself continually by our ongoing communion with the Lord and with each other. The Peace that is Christ Himself is a contagious reality.

Ultimately what is happening on the outside comes from what is happening on the inside. Therefore, we should radiate Christ as a light in the darkness. We should allow ourselves to grow in the likeness of the Son, as we surrender ourselves by saying 'yes' to Him every day. This is what conversion of heart really means. It comes about by our firm response to the call of love. As we enter more and more into Jesus through his passion and death, by bearing the 'sin of the world' with him, we share in the transformative power of the Paschal mystery. This is what the 'triumph' of love is all about. As we grow in our desire to enter more deeply with our brothers and sisters in communion with their pain, we enter more profoundly with them into the Heart of Christ's Love.

The Holy Father praised the Ukrainian people for not giving up. "Your pain is my pain," he tells them. The Pope calls us all to solidarity, that virtue by which we share in the sufferings of others. The same virtue we learn too from Mary and Joseph. We walk with them on their long, arduous journey until they reach the place where the Christ Child, the Savior of the world, is to be born. We should not fail either to walk with all those who suffer in our world today.

If we follow the example of Mary and Joseph, the real joy that is deep within us will come alive again. Constant fidelity to our own mission will bring the true Light into the world. We will proclaim the Gospel by our own lives. We will be true evangelizers.

Let us be this Christmas and always a light in the darkness, shining stars that reflect the brightness of the one who is 'Light from Light and true God from true God.'

May the Peace of Christ come down upon you all and may you experience a joy that no one can ever take from you.