

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

During the Christmas season, we naturally want to continue keeping in mind the conflicts afflicting the land of Jesus and the rest of the world. Knowing that we are children of the same Father leads us to consider what happens everywhere as something very close to us, very much our own. “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (*1 Cor* 12:26-27). Let us try to be generous in our prayer and sacrifice, knowing that “the least of our acts done in charity redounds to the benefit of all” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 953). At the same time, let us ask our Lord for his grace so that our concern for peace in the world also leads us to make specific resolutions to do what we can to bring peace to our own family, work environment, etc.

“Peace, truth, unity, justice. How difficult it often seems to eliminate the barriers to human harmony,” Saint Josemaría said. “And yet we Christians are called to bring about that miracle of fraternity” (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 157). Contemplating the Birth of Jesus can be a special opportunity to remove obstacles that separate us from others and focus our attention on what unites us. We can’t let differences have the last word in our personal relationships. By directing our eyes towards the manger, towards that Child who is born for everyone, we can find the strength needed to forgive, to ask for forgiveness, to understand and love.

The stable at Bethlehem also speaks to us of poverty. Jesus was born with few material possessions, but with so much love: that of Mary, Joseph and the shepherds. As Pope Francis said, “they were all poor people, united by affection and amazement, not by wealth and great expectations. The poverty of the manger thus shows us where the true riches in life are to be found: not in money and power, but in relationships and persons” (Homily, December 24, 2022). Christ shows us that the best gift we can give on these dates is not something material, but prayer and affection. Let us try to extend this affection to the people most in need, with our human closeness and accompanying each specific help with a request to God. Thus, although we cannot solve material poverty, more people will experience the richness of feeling loved.

The Virgin Mary, who welcomed with serenity and love all the moments of her Son’s life, will help us find the peace and joy that come from letting Jesus also be born in our hearts.

Your Father sends his warmest greetings and blessing,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leonardo". The script is cursive and fluid.

Rome, 15 December 2023