

Vatican calls on Christians, Hindus to rekindle positivity and hope during pandemic

Christian and Hindu religious traditions "teach us to remain positive and hopeful even amid adversity" says Vatican message to Hindus celebrating the festival of lights



La Croix International staff, Vatican City, *La Croix International*, 13 November 2020

The Vatican has called on Christians and Hindus to join all people of good will in rekindling positivity and hope during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the future.

Even the "boldest hope and positivity can dissipate in the tragic situations" caused by the present pandemic yet the trust of Christians and Hindus in God's providence inspires them "to remain optimistic and to work to rekindle hope in the midst of our societies", the Vatican said in its message to Hindus celebrating the feast of **Diwali festival**. Christian and Hindu religious traditions "teach us to remain positive and hopeful even amid adversity" and so "in cherishing those religious traditions and teachings" it hopes that gestures of care, affection, kindness, gentleness and compassion be more contagious than the coronavirus itself.

Diwali or Deepavali, also known as the "festival of lights," is a major Hindu festival celebrated every year in October or November with the dates being determined by the Hindu lunar calendar. This year millions of people in various countries will be celebrating the festival November 14, although it may locally vary a day before or after. Fiji, Guyana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago all celebrate Diwali as a public holiday.

Rooted in the Hindu culture, Diwali celebrates the triumph of light over darkness, life over death and good over evil. As is customary, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue issued its annual message for Diwali this year.

Entitled "**Christians and Hindus: Rekindling positivity and hope during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond**" the message dated November 6, was signed by Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot and Monsignor Indunil Kodithuwakku Janakaratne Kankanamalage, respectively president and secretary of the Council.

This is the Vatican's 25th message for Diwali and reflects on the "apparently insurmountable obstacles, socio-economic, political and spiritual challenges, and widespread anxiety, uncertainty and fear" brought on by the coronavirus pandemic.

Instituted by Pope Saint Paul VI in 1964, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue regularly sends out messages each year on the occasion of Diwali, as well as the Muslim observance of Ramadan and Id al Fitr, and the Buddhist festival of Vesakh.

Diwali, which Hindus in most parts of the world celebrate, dates to the Vedic period, around 2,000 years before the birth of Christ.

As part of the celebration, gifts and sweets are exchanged among relatives and neighbors. Children set off noisy fireworks. It is believed that the light and sounds of fireworks drive away evil spirits.

Hindus illuminate their homes with earthen oil lamps and colorful electric bulbs, recalling stories from their scriptures of the victory of good over evil and commemorating it as a victory of light over darkness.

The festival resonates with Catholics as light is a very important part of Christianity and has much significance for Catholics who light candles in all ceremonies, including baptism, Communion and Easter.