

Vatican sends greetings to Muslims as Ramadan begins



Muslims gather inside the Great Mosque in Paris during a meeting with French Muslims authority to determine the start of the Ramadan in Paris (ANSA)

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue releases a message addressed to "all Muslim brothers and sisters" to show solidarity and friendship as they start their month of Ramadan and look ahead to 'Id al-Fitr.

Vatican News staff writer, 16 April 2021

Addressing "all Muslim brothers and sisters", the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue's Message for the month of Ramadan and 'Id al-Fitr begins by passing on "fraternal good wishes for a month rich in divine blessings and spiritual advancement". The Message notes that "fasting, along with prayer, almsgiving and other pious practices, brings us closer to God our Creator and to all those with whom we live and work, and helps us to continue walking together on the path of fraternity".

Comforting gestures

Noting that over the last few months "of suffering, anguish and sorrow", especially during the lockdown periods, "we sensed our need for divine assistance, but also for expressions and gestures of fraternal solidarity". There are so many small gestures, continues the Message: a telephone call, a message of support and comfort, a prayer, help in buying medicines or food, advice to simply "show the security of knowing that someone is always there for us in times of necessity".

This need for divine assistance that we need and seek "is manifold", continues the Message: God's mercy, pardon, providence and other spiritual and material gifts. "Yet, what we need most in these times, is hope".

Hope

The Message then turns its attention to the importance of "hope". "As we are aware", it reads, "while certainly including optimism", hope goes beyond it. The Message explains that "while optimism is a human attitude, hope has its basis in something religious: God loves us, and therefore cares for us through his providence".

"Hope arises from our belief that all our problems and trials have a meaning, a value and a purpose, however difficult or impossible it may be for us to understand the reason for them or to find a way out of them.

"Hope also carries with it belief in the goodness present in the heart of every person. Many times, in situations of difficulty and despair, help, and the hope it brings, can come from those whom we least expect".

Fraternity, a source of hope

The Message then notes that "human fraternity, in its numerous manifestations, thus becomes a source of hope for all, especially for those in any kind of need.

It continues with a word of gratitude. "Thank you to all those who so promptly reacted by showing the utmost signs of solidarity in times of crises. All these persons and their goodness remind us believers that the spirit of fraternity is universal, and that it transcends all boundaries: ethnic, religious, social and economic", reads the Message. "In adopting this spirit, we imitate God, who looks benevolently upon the humanity he created, upon all other creatures and upon the entire universe. This is why the growing care and concern for the planet, our 'common home', is, according to Pope Francis, yet another sign of hope. Fighting enemies of hope

"We are also aware that hope has its enemies," warns the Message. "Lack of faith in God's love and care; loss of trust in our brothers and sisters; pessimism; despair and its opposite, unfounded presumption; unfair generalizations based on one's own negative experiences, and so forth", are all enemies to faith it says. "These harmful thoughts, attitudes and reactions must be effectively countered, so as to strengthen hope in God and trust in all our brothers and sisters".

Pope's invitation to renewed hope

Bringing the Message to an end, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue notes that in his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, "Pope Francis speaks frequently of hope". In it, he says, "I invite everyone to renewed hope, 'for hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfilment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile'. Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope".

Finally, the Message reads that "we, Christians and Muslims, are called to be bearers of hope, for the present life and for the life to come, and to be witnesses, restorers and builders of this hope, especially for those experiencing difficulties and despair". And in a sign of spiritual solidarity, it says, "we assure you of our prayer, and we send best wishes for a peaceful and fruitful Ramadan, and for a joyful 'Id al-Fitr."