

Pope's Easter Urbi et Orbi message: "The contagion of hope"

Pope Francis' 'Urbi et Orbi' message on Easter Sunday challenges us to ban indifference, self-centredness, division and forgetfulness during this time of Covid-19 – and to spread the "contagion" of hope.

By Seàn-Patrick Lovett

No banner hung from the central balcony of St Peter's Basilica. No bands played the Vatican anthem. No floral arrangements decorated St Peter's Square. Nearby streets were empty and silent, as Italy continues to respect a nationwide coronavirus lockdown.

Inside the Basilica, surrounded only by his closest collaborators, Pope Francis delivered his traditional Easter *Urbi et Orbi* message to the city of Rome and the world.

A different "contagion"

Millions of people watched and listened on various media platforms as the Pope repeated the Easter proclamation: "Christ, my hope, is risen!". He called this message "a different 'contagion'", one that is transmitted "from heart to heart".

This Good News is like a new flame that springs up "in the night of a world already faced with epochal challenges, and now oppressed by a pandemic severely testing our whole human family", said the Pope.

Christ's resurrection is not a "magic formula that makes problems vanish", he continued, "it is the victory of love over the root of evil". This victory "does not 'by-pass' suffering and death, but passes through them, opening a path in the abyss, transforming evil into good", he added.

Comfort for those affected by the coronavirus

The Pope's thoughts turned immediately to those directly affected by the coronavirus. "For many, this is an Easter of solitude, lived amid the sorrow and hardship that the pandemic is causing, from physical suffering to economic difficulties", he said.

"This disease has not only deprived us of human closeness, but also of the possibility of receiving in person the consolation that flows from the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Reconciliation", said Pope Francis.

"But the Lord has not left us alone", he added. "United in our prayer, we are convinced that He has laid His hand upon us".

Gratitude to those providing essential services

The Pope then expressed his gratitude and affection to doctors and nurses, and "to all who work diligently to guarantee the essential services necessary for civil society, and to the law enforcement and military personnel who in many countries have helped ease people's difficulties and sufferings".

Encouragement to work for the common good

Pope Francis acknowledged that "this is also a time of worry about an uncertain future, about jobs that are at risk". He encouraged political leaders "to work actively for the common good", providing the means "to enable everyone to lead a dignified life and, when circumstances allow, to assist them in resuming their normal daily activities".

Not a time for indifference

This is not a time for indifference, said the Pope, “because the whole world is suffering and needs to be united in facing the pandemic”. He prayed that the risen Jesus may grant hope “to all the poor, to those living on the peripheries, to refugees and the homeless”. Pope Francis also called for the relaxation of international sanctions and for “the reduction, if not the forgiveness, of the debt burdening the balance sheets of the poorest nations”.

Not a time for self-centredness

This is not a time for self-centredness, continued Pope Francis, because “the challenge we are facing is shared by all”. Europe, in particular, was able “to overcome the rivalries of the past” following the Second World War, “thanks to a concrete spirit of solidarity”. It is urgent “these rivalries do not regain force”, the Pope continued. We all need to recognize ourselves “as part of a single family and support one another”. Selfishly pursuing particular interests risks “damaging the peaceful coexistence and development of future generations”, he added.

Not a time for division

This is not a time for division, said the Pope, as he appealed for “an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world”. Criticizing the vast amounts of money spent on the arms trade, Pope Francis called for a solution to the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon. He said he hoped Israelis and Palestinians might resume dialogue, that the situation in eastern Ukraine might be resolved, and that “terrorist attacks carried out against so many innocent people in different African countries may come to an end”.

Not a time for forgetfulness

This is not a time for forgetfulness, continued Pope Francis, referring to the humanitarian crises being faced in Asia and Africa. He prayed for refugees and migrants “living in unbearable conditions, especially in Libya and on the border between Greece and Turkey”. The Pope prayed also that solutions may be found in Venezuela, allowing “international assistance to a population suffering from the grave political, socio-economic and health situation” there.

Christ dispels the darkness of suffering

“Indifference, self-centredness, division and forgetfulness are not words we want to hear at this time”, said the Pope. These words “seem to prevail when fear and death overwhelm us”, and we want to ban them forever, he added.

Pope Francis concluded his *Urbi et Orbi* message with a prayer: “May Christ, who has already defeated death and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, dispel the darkness of our suffering humanity and lead us into the light of His glorious day. A day that knows no end”.