

ACSJC Discussion Guide:

World Day of Peace Message 2015

NO LONGER SLAVES, BUT BROTHERS AND SISTERS

In his 2015 Message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis focuses on the scourge of human trafficking and slavery in the modern world. He refers to the central theme of his message for 2014:

the desire for a full life ... which includes a longing for fraternity which draws us to fellowship with others and enables us to see them not as enemies or rivals, but as brothers and sisters to be accepted and embraced. (#1)

Pope Francis constantly reminds us that we are by nature relational beings and relationships based on justice and love are fundamental to our human development. Our calling to forge relationships marked by respect, justice and love is damaged by human beings' exploitation of one another. One abominable example of this exploitation is slavery.

Listening to God's plan for humanity

The theme *No longer slaves but brothers and sisters* is drawn from St Paul's letter to Philemon, whom he asks to welcome his former slave as a brother now that he has become a Christian.

Conversion to Christ, the beginning of a life lived in Christian discipleship, thus constitutes a new birth (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Pet 1:3) which generates fraternity as the fundamental bond of family life and the basis of life in society. (#2)

Indeed this fraternity had its origins in the creation of the first man and woman and their offspring, who were 'created in the image and likeness of God'. (#2)

Tragically between the first creation recounted in the book of Genesis and the new birth in Christ, there is:

the negative reality of sin, which often disrupts human fraternity and constantly disfigures the beauty and nobility of our being brothers and sisters in the one human family. (#2)

The many faces of slavery yesterday and today

While there have been periods in history where slavery was accepted and regulated by law, slavery is seen today as a crime against humanity. Yet despite international agreements to end slavery in all its forms, millions of people today – children, women and men of all ages – are deprived of freedom and forced to live in conditions akin to slavery.

I think of the many men and women labourers, including minors, subjugated in different sectors, whether formally or informally, in domestic or agricultural workplaces, or in the

manufacturing or mining industry; whether in countries where labour regulations fail to comply with international norms and minimum standards, or, equally illegally, in countries which lack legal protection for workers' rights. (#3)

Some deeper causes of slavery

Today, as in the past, slavery is rooted in a notion of the human person which allows him or her to be treated as an object. (#4)

Besides this deeper cause of slavery, there are other causes such as poverty, underdevelopment, exclusion, corruption, armed conflicts, violence and criminal activity.

A shared commitment to ending slavery

As well as efforts to free people from slavery and assist them in their rehabilitation, there is need for changes in law which include prevention, protection of victims and prosecution of perpetrators.

There is a need for just laws which are centred on the human person, uphold fundamental rights and restore those rights when they have been violated. Such laws should also provide for the rehabilitation of victims, ensure their personal safety, and include effective means of enforcement which leave no room for corruption or impunity. (#5)

Globalising fraternity, not slavery or indifference

Pope Francis urges us to form a new worldwide solidarity to overcome the 'globalisation of indifference', and to begin by acting in our own daily lives.

Let us ask ourselves, as individuals and as communities, whether we feel challenged when, in our daily lives, we meet or deal with persons who could be victims of human trafficking, or when we are tempted to select items which may well have been produced by exploiting others. Some of us ... close our eyes to this. Others, however, decide to do something about it, to join civic associations or to practice small, everyday gestures – which have so much merit! – such as offering a kind word, a greeting or a smile ... [W]e are facing a global phenomenon which exceeds the competence of any one community or country. In order to eliminate it, we need a mobilisation comparable in size to that of the phenomenon itself. (#6)

DAY OF PRAYER, REFLECTION AND ACTION AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Pope Francis has announced that 8 February 2015 would be an International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking.

February 8 is the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, who was kidnapped as a child and sold into slavery in Sudan and Italy. Once Josephine was freed, she dedicated her life to sharing her testament of deliverance from slavery and comforting the poor and suffering.

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) and the Australian Bishops have issued a statement in support of the Pope's announcement: see <https://www.catholic.org.au/acbc-media/media-centre/media-releases-new>. To mark this day, ACRATH has prepared a reflection sheet (available on the ACRATH home page: <http://acrath.org.au>).

You are encouraged to host or attend prayer services to reflect on the experiences of those who are suffering through human trafficking and exploitation. You are invited to pray for the emotional, physical, and spiritual healing, and make a personal commitment to work against human trafficking. Awareness-raising to educate communities about human trafficking is essential.

ACTIONS:

LEARN about human trafficking – globally and locally.

PRAY for victims of trafficking and for an end to this slavery.

DEMAND slave-free products. Buy fair trade when possible.

ADVOCATE for state and federal legislation that protects victims. For more information visit www.acrath.org.au/5487/world-day-of-prayer-reflection-and-action-against-human-trafficking.

For reflection and discussion

What was new to you in the Pope's message?

What can you research further?

Where does slavery exist in Australia?

How did this message affect you?

What does the reality of slavery in our world mean to you?

What does the term 'fraternity' mean to you?

What action can you take on this issue?

Make sure that goods you buy are not made by slave labour. For suggestions, go to the 'Help trafficked people' section of the website of Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH): <http://acrath.org.au/take-action/your-role>.

Find out the Australian Government's policy on human trafficking. Go to: <http://acrath.org.au/links/australian-links/government-police-human-rights>.

Resources

The text of Pope Francis's message can be found at the Vatican website:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20141208_messaggio-xlviiii-giornata-mondiale-pace-2015.html#_ftnref9

Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH):

www.acrath.org.au

Prayer

I pray for an end to wars, conflicts and the great suffering caused by human agency, by epidemics past and present, and by the devastation wrought by natural disasters. I pray especially that, on the basis of our common calling to cooperate with God and all people of good will for the advancement of harmony and peace in the world, we may resist the temptation to act in a manner unworthy of our humanity. Amen (#1)

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