

MESSAGE OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
MESSAGE TO THE NATIONAL VIRTUAL ENCUESTRO IN-SERVICE
OCTOBER 9-10, 2020

My Dear Friends in Christ,

I am happy to be able to join you for this National Virtual Encuentro In-Service, as you fulfill the final stage of the Fifth National Encuentro Process, celebrating the fruits of the Fifth National Encuentro, while articulating the vision for Hispanic/Latino ministry for the next decade and beyond. I am grateful to Archbishop Perez and Bishop Cepeda for their invitation to address you. As the Apostolic Nuncio, I bring you the cordial greetings of Pope Francis, assuring you of his prayers and spiritual closeness. The Holy Father accompanies you on your journey of faith.

Pastoral accompaniment has been a major theme of this pontificate, whose programmatic document *Evangelii Gaudium* offers a substantial treatment of the theme within the context of evangelization. There he states:

“In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ’s closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Ex* 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169)

Just as the Holy Father calls us to make present the “fragrance of Christ’s closeness”, which, at the same time, brings healing, liberation, and encouragement, so also the Pope accompanies us. This summer the Holy Father has used his Wednesday audiences to address “healing our world” from this pandemic.

While certainly this pandemic has caused a significant loss of life and has crippled the economy, it also allows us to re-evaluate how we have been fulfilling our mission as the Church. While many were concerned about compliance with civil authorities and return to public worship, the pandemic revealed that many of the structures that exist in the Church – from the number of parishes to chancery offices to apostolates – are in sore need of *pastoral conversion* for the sake of the mission. That is, the Church must move from maintenance to mission. As a young and vibrant presence in the Church in the United States, the Hispanic/Latino community does not necessarily have an attachment to sterile structures or the mentality which says, “We have always done it this way.”

The Holy Father wants you to be both creative and faithful. His General Audiences began by speaking about Jesus. True renewal, which will heal our world, begins with Jesus. In the very first audience, he said, “The pandemic continues to cause deep wounds, exposing our vulnerability. ...Thus, we must keep our gaze firmly fixed on Jesus: in the midst of this pandemic, our eyes on Jesus; and with this *faith* embrace the *hope* of the Kingdom of God that Jesus Himself brings us ... A Kingdom of justice and of peace that is manifested through works of *charity*, which in their turn increase hope and strengthen faith.” (General Audience, 5 August 2020)

Jesus gave His life for all of us. The Holy Father believes that if the world and Church are to heal, we need to recognize our interconnectedness. (cf. General Audience, 12 August 2020) The Hispanic/Latino community, particularly the new immigrants, has suffered and, at times, been dehumanized by the separation of families and prolonged incarceration of those searching for a better life. The Holy Father calls us to resist this dehumanizing “throwaway culture”, especially by countering individualism, remembering that we are connected by our common humanity, our faith, and our common home.

In his third audience addressing healing the world (19 August 2020), the Holy Father took up the theme of the preferential option for the poor, which is necessarily connected to the virtue of charity. Although many want to find a cure for the coronavirus, we also need to search for a cure for social inequality, inequality of opportunity, and progressive marginalization. The Hispanic/Latino community knows this experience of suffering but does not fail in its charity, recognizing that Christ was poor and chose the condition of a servant. As leaders of the Church, when things “return to normal”, you cannot accept inequality as “normal.” Again, *pastoral conversion* demands continuing to work for justice.

The Holy Father subsequently spoke of the universal destination of goods and the virtue of hope. While the United States is the land of opportunity, it cannot be the land of opportunity for only some. For example, while many have the possibility of education through online platforms, for others, especially the poor and those who live in impoverished districts, education has stopped. How will we educate and form our young people to counter this type of inequality? This social inequality has resulted not only from a sick economy but also from environmental degradation, both of which result from the desire to possess and dominate others.

The Holy Father recommends that we find a remedy by emphasizing the importance of community, and not merely individual possession. He said:

“In fact, from among all the species, we are the beings who are the most cooperative and we flourish in community, as is seen well in the experience of the saints. There is a saying in Spanish that inspired me to write this phrase. It says: *“Floreceamos en racimo, como los santos”*: we flourish in community, as is seen well in the experience of the saints.” (General Audience 26 August 2020)

Another “remedy” for the sickness we are presently experience is solidarity, which reflects our inter-dependence. Solidarity demands a “change of mindset.” (cf. General Audience, 2 September 2019) which thinks in terms of “community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few.” It is not merely a question of helping others; it is a matter of justice.

The Pentecost event shows how the community of faith can be united in diversity and solidarity, overcoming racial tension and social inequality. The Holy Father remarked:

“With Pentecost, God makes himself present and inspires the *faith* of the community *united in diversity and in solidarity*. Diversity and solidarity united in harmony, this is the way. A diversity in solidarity possesses “antibodies” that ensure that the singularity of each person — which is a gift, unique and unrepeatable — does not become sick with individualism, with selfishness. Diversity in solidarity also possesses antibodies that heal social structures and processes that have degenerated into systems of injustice, systems of oppression. Therefore, solidarity today is the road to take towards a post-pandemic

world, towards the healing of our interpersonal and social ills. There is no other way.”
(General Audience, 2 September 2020)

In his next audience (General Audience, 9 September 2020), Pope Francis reminded us of our need to pursue the common good. The coronavirus has demonstrated that each person’s true good is a common good and that the common good is a true good for the person. This is why together we should try to build a society that looks after everyone’s health. The Holy Father says that “A virus that does not recognize barriers, borders, or cultural or political distinctions must be faced with a love without barriers, borders or distinctions.”

Only this love can help build a “civilization of love” in which social structures encourage us to share rather than to compete and that allow us to include the most vulnerable and not to cast them aside, expressing the best in our human nature and not the worst. While he asks this of our world, we could ask this also of our Church, especially here in the United States. Are we stuck in our parochial structures or can we envision our love extending beyond parish boundaries to reach those at the margins?

Finally, the Holy Father reminds us that we live together in a common home, which reminds us of our collective responsibility for the planet and for one another. It is not a mere question of ecology but one of “human ecology.” Once more, calling us to think beyond the coronavirus to another type of sickness, namely treating the world as a “resource” to be used. Rather than simply lamenting the throwaway culture, Pope Francis offers a solution:

“What is the antidote against the sickness of not taking care of our common home? It is contemplation. ... our common home, creation, is not a mere "resource". Creatures have a value in and of themselves and each one "reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness". This value and this ray of divine light must be discovered and, in order to discover it, we need to be silent, we need to listen, and we need to contemplate. Contemplation also heals the soul.” (General Audience, 16 September 2020).

My Dear Friends, as you gather “virtually”, I invite you to contemplate your common humanity and your experience, while deepening your sense of awareness of your uniqueness and unity in diversity. The insights from your countries of origin and your experiences as Hispanic Americans can help the Church be the Church Christ has called her to be: a prophetic Church that resists hyper-individualism and the throwaway culture, offering instead a coherent vision of a common humanity within a civilization of love.

May God be with you during these days and may he bless the work of your hands.