

Pope invokes peace, security and mutual respect in Afghanistan

Pope Francis' appeal at the Angelus to pray for the martyred Afghan population who are living in these hours of anguish because of the surrender to the Taliban. On the Solemnity of the Assumption, Mary's humility as a secret for reaching up to Heaven. Closeness also to earthquake-stricken Haiti.



Vatican City (AsiaNews) - Joining together in prayer that Afghanistan may find peace "in full mutual respect". Faced with the anguish of the civilian population over the surrender of the government in Kabul before the Taliban, Pope Francis made an appeal today from St. Peter's Square at the end of the Angelus.

"I join in the unanimous concern over the news coming from Afghanistan - he said - I invite you to pray with me to the God of peace so that the din of arms may cease and solutions may be found at the table of dialogue. Only in this way will the tormented population of that country - men, women, elderly and children - be able to return to their homes and live in peace and security in full mutual respect".

The appeal for Afghanistan came on the Solemnity of the Assumption, 15th August, during which the pope invited the faithful to turn their gaze to the humility of Mary. Introducing the Angelus prayer, the pontiff indicated this trait as the true secret of the Virgin. "The human eye - he observed - seeks greatness and is dazzled by what is flashy. God, on the other hand, does not look at appearances, but at the heart and is enchanted by humility."

"Looking at the Assumed Mary, we can say that humility is the way that leads to Heaven. The word humility - the pope recalled again - comes from the Latin term humus, which means earth. It is paradoxical: in order to reach the top, in Heaven, one must remain low, like the earth."

Pope Francis invited everyone to make this teaching their own through some questions: "How humble am I? Do I seek to be recognized by others, to affirm myself and be praised, or do I think of serving? Do I know how to listen, like Mary, or do I just want to talk and receive attention? Do I know how to be silent, like Mary, or am I always chattering? Do I know how to take a step back, to defuse quarrels and discussions, or do I just try to excel?"

"Mary - continued the pontiff - is the full of grace precisely because of her humility . For us, too, humility is the starting point, the beginning of our having faith. It is fundamental to be poor in spirit, that is, in need of God. He who is full of himself does not give room to God". Recalling the definition of the poet Dante in Paradise, who defines Mary as "humble and high more than a creature," Pope Francis dwelt on the days of the full of grace, which "were not very striking. They often followed one another in the same way, in silence: externally, nothing extraordinary. But God's gaze always remained on her, admiring her humility, her availability, the beauty of her heart never touched by sin."

This is a great message of hope for all. "For you," Pope Francis concluded, "who live tiring and often difficult days. Mary reminds you today that God is also calling you to this destiny of glory. These are not pretty words, this is not an artfully created happy ending, a pious illusion or a false consolation. No, it is pure reality, alive and true as Our Lady assumed into Heaven. Let us celebrate her today with the love of children, joyful but humble, animated by the hope of one day being with her in Heaven".

Along with the people of Afghanistan, Pope Francis also expressed his concern for also to the Caribbean island of Haiti, struck yesterday by a devastating earthquake with hundreds of victims. "I express my closeness - he commented - and may the solidarity of all may alleviate the consequences of the tragedy."

Finally, he invited everyone to visit a Marian shrine on this Solemnity of the Assumption to venerate Our Lady.

Situation in Kabul chaotic, says Jesuit priest in Afghanistan

Here is a fresh report from the Head of the Jesuits priest, who works in Afghanistan, showing the desperate situation in which Afghanistan has fallen, making Pope Francis appeal even more urgent and dramatic.



By Jose Torres Jr.

Kabul, Afghanistan, Aug 17, 2021 / 13:01 pm

A Jesuit priest stranded in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover of the country said the situation is "changing" and "chaotic."

"The way the situation is changing in the country, it is anyone's imagination," said Father Jerome Sequeira, head of the Jesuit mission in Afghanistan, in a letter to friends and colleagues.

The priest said the mission has already suspended its activities across the country and has ensured the safety of all its staff. Jesuit Refugee Service “has suspended all activities for an indefinite period of time, and all are hibernating in their homes or communities,” wrote Father Sequeira. “All flights are canceled and it all depends on the agreement between [the United Nations] bodies and the Taliban,” he added. He said the Jesuit service “is putting all efforts” to evacuate him and another Jesuit priest.

“Thank you for your continuous prayers for our safety,” said Father Sequeira, even as he added that “safety does not make sense here” anymore because of the situation.

Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, said Aug. 17 that “the fall of Afghanistan and the departure of its elected leaders are a cause for concern, because of the possible denial of human rights, particularly for women and girls. My two visits to the country confirmed my impression regarding the sacrifices, even including death, made by many members of the Armed Forces and civilians striving to bring stability and peace to the people there. At the moment, however, we can only pray for the Afghani people, support any humanitarian efforts that are in place there (especially through Catholic Relief Services), and give voice to local leadership on all sides. The human dignity of this people must be respected.”

He added, “I am particularly concerned about those in the US Armed Forces who continue to defend refugees and assets in the country. We pray that there will be no violence and a peaceful departure for all of those desiring to leave.” Fr. Sequeira said the Taliban “are busy occupying all government systems and putting their own persons.”

Father Sequeira said “thousands of people are trying to flee” and are fleeing to airports. “The Taliban were shooting in the air and trying to control the crowd,” he said. The priest ended his letter, saying, “Did we, the international community, invest so much and establish so much in the last 20 years just to hand it over to the Taliban in a matter of days?”

On Sunday, Pope Francis asked for prayers for the people of Afghanistan.

“I ask all of you to pray with me to the God of peace so that the clamor of weapons might cease and solutions can be found at the table of dialogue,” he said.

“Only thus can the battered population of that country – men, women, elderly and children – return to their own homes, and live in peace and security, in total mutual respect.”

Caritas Italiana, meanwhile, expressed fears for the safety of Christians in the country, warning that it may need to suspend its activities as instability increases. The charity of the Italian Catholic bishops has been in Afghanistan since the 1990s and is currently focused on helping vulnerable minors. The Italian charity has been supporting a large program of emergency aid, rehabilitation, and development in Afghanistan, including the construction of four schools and 100 houses.

The Taliban captured Afghanistan’s biggest cities in days rather than the months predicted by United States military intelligence earlier. The UN Security Council called for talks to create a new government in Afghanistan after Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned of “chilling” curbs on human rights and violations against women and girls. During their 1996-2001 rule, women could not work and punishments such as public stoning, whipping, and hanging were administered.

Praying for Afghanistan means also praying for the Taliban, just like Jesus told Saint Faustina on the 4th day of the novena of the Divine Mercy:

„Today bring to Me those who do not believe in God and those who do not know Me,

I was thinking also of them during My bitter Passion, and their future zeal comforted My Heart. Immerse them in the ocean of My mercy.”

AMEN