

Courtesy Translation

Rome, December 16th 2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am writing to you this year as well in order to wish you, more than ever, to celebrate and live with joy and depth God's great mystery, since He became a man for his love for us and for offering us salvation.

Nowadays, we are all going through a tough challenge that requires sacrifices and virtue. In particular, we believers, nourished and sustained by the grace of the sacraments, which are generous gifts from the Lord, have to be valid witnesses of hope and confidence in a world that is often more inclined to turn its attention - almost exclusively - towards material goods and only to the health of the body, while forgetting the importance of taking care of one's soul.

We, educated in the principles of the faith and hoping to grow ever more on the path of the Lord, we are first of all called to remind ourselves and to remind our fellow brothers of the importance of our interiority and our spirituality.

Saint Augustine can teach us a lot in this regard because, after a long search among the external goods of the world, finally found God in himself: "I loved you late, I loved you so late. Yes, because you were inside me but I was outside. I was looking for you there. [...] You called me and your cry broke my deafness" (Conf. X, 27,38).

How important it is for mankind to take care and educate the spiritual aspect, their interior lives! What a great benefit this brings to people's existence!

It is only through concern for his own interiority and, consequently, for the relationship with God, that humanity can face all difficulties, sustained in faith by the proximity of the Lord; living this important aspect of human life in a good way represents a great testimony which puts us in communion with one another!

Full of this faith and hope, we must wait for scientists to identify the right remedies against the pandemic, and that these medical solutions - as the Holy Father has repeatedly requested - can be easily accessible to everybody, without any distinction.

The upcoming Christmas will be different than we are used to. Let's not be discouraged: even this Holy Christmas can be a positive occasion as long as its true and deep essence is grasped. Once again, I have made Saint Augustine's warning mine: "Observe, man, what God has become for you"! The Word was incarnated for the salvation of man, to recover his creature that had fallen in sin; Jesus, the only begotten Son of the Father, does not boast of rights or privileges, but reigns through service and governs the world by coming closer to the smallest and the simplest people.

God, who in history wanted to be incarnated, offers us immense dignity and makes us all *equal* in Christ.

Allow me, one last time, to consider a passage from Saint Augustine which supported my prayer and my reflection in these days of preparation for the Holy Christmas:

The Lord Jesus wanted to become a man for us. [...] At the beginning He was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God (Jn 1,1). O food and bread of the angels! The angels feed on you, they are satisfied with you without getting tired, they live on you, they are as though imbued with you, they are blessed with you. But where are you now because of me? In a small accommodation, wrapped in tea towels, placed in a manger. And why and for whom? The one who regulates the course of the stars sucks the breast of a woman: he nourishes the angels, speaks in the womb of the Father and is silent in the womb of his mother. But when he gets to an appropriate age he will speak, he will fully share the good news with us. He will suffer for us, he will die for us, he will rise again showing us a sage of the reward that awaits us, he will ascend to heaven in the presence of the disciples, he will return from heaven for judgment. The one who is lying in the manger became weak but did not lose his power: he assumed what he was not but remained what he was. We have the infant Christ before us: we grow up with him.

With this thought, I wish to pray for your intentions and for your families. During the Christmas liturgies I will remember each and every one of you individually: I will take your loved ones with me to the altar, in particular the children, the elderly, the sick and the many needy people who, with comfort, are assisted by so many initiatives of the Constantinian Order.

I invoke the blessing of the Lord upon you all.

Renato Raffaele Card. Martino

Protodeacon of the Holy Roman Church

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