

Jesus Caritas Fraternity of Priests

Christmas Letter to the brothers around the world 2024

"Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord...is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear." (Zeph. 3:14-16)

Dear brothers,

Warm greetings of joy and hope to you in the spirit of a humble God who lives amongst us!!!



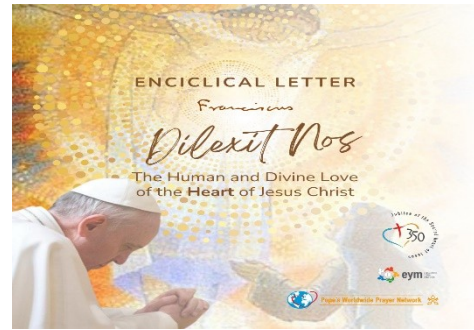
How is everyone doing? What significant gifts are you celebrating at this time? It would be good that we all take a decisive stop, make a general re-view of life, both personal and communal, and listen gently to the invitations of the Emmanuel, the God of surprises. As you gaze lovingly on the nativity scene, bring your own poverty before the Infant God and begin to see again with renewed wonder and awe at the Mystery. May the poverty of God speak to your own poverty. His divine

humanity restores our humanity to its original goodness. His humble divinity strips our humanity to its core so that it may be an estimable vessel of divinity. This is all God's benevolent initiative. Together with the Psalmist, we could only say, "forever, I will sing the goodness of the Lord." The extent and the quality of our human life in this world is but our humble thank you to this great gift.

Now that many of you I am privileged to have met in person, I hold several persons close to my heart while I am writing this letter. I wonder what are their experiences of joys, struggles and hopes during this kairos moment of Christmas? My thoughts are with our brother Carlos Roberto at his place of healing and recovery in Brazil, with Aurelio's community of displaced women and children in Burkina Faso, with Kuno's engagement with prostituted women in Germany, with Juan Baraza in the peripheries of Chile. I am holding our brothers living as a minority in a Muslim dominated population in Asia, our brothers in Africa who live amidst tragic poverty and violence, our brothers in Europe who welcome displaced migrants caused by the war in Ukraine. I wonder what gives joy and peace to them at this time? Where is hope for them? And what about our brothers who live in the silence of old age and fragility or of our brothers in the peripheries of their dioceses?

Traversing the multi-faceted realities of our time, I am inviting you that we walk with Pope Francis as he meditates with us on the human and divine love of the heart of Jesus in his latest encyclical, *Delixit Nos*. For him, there is a greater need to rediscover the importance of the heart, the innermost part of our being, the locus of our desires and the place where important decisions are made. We ask: do we have a heart that seeks to know and understand the deeper meaning of life and to bring to unity conflicting polarities, moral dilemmas and paradoxes of the present time? A person without a heart is cold, numb to the realities of the other and live very indifferent and superficial lives. They rush "frenetically from one thing to another without really knowing why, and ending up as insatiable consumers and slaves to the mechanisms of a market unconcerned about the deeper meaning of our lives." (#2)

There is a way of living and responding to the realities of our time that comes from the heart, with a heart. In paragraph 179, Pope Francis proposes Saint Charles de Foucauld as an icon for contemporary humanity in its search for meaning and authenticity. In his life, Brother Charles "sought to imitate Jesus by living and acting as he did, in a constant effort to do what Jesus would have done in his place. Only by being conformed to the sentiments of the heart of Christ could he fully achieve this goal." In Brother Charles, imitating Jesus' life and action, which starts as a simple desire turns into a daily resolve, a constant effort to do always in reference to what Jesus would have done. It becomes a daily examen of mind and heart marked by a firm and progressive commitment to see as Jesus sees, to do as Jesus would do, to live his life as Jesus would live. It is a daily dying to self of a disciple and of constant conforming of his very being to that of Jesus.



After being conformed in mind and heart to Jesus, Brother Charles desires to bring the same love of Jesus which he personally experienced to others. "His missionary outreach to the poorest and most forgotten of our world, led him to take as his emblem the words, "Iesus-Caritas", with the symbol of the heart of Christ surmounted by a cross." These two movements in the spirituality of Brother Charles, namely; taking in Jesus and giving away Jesus to our world today are like the 2 movements of the cardiac cycle of the human heart. The heart pumps in poorly-oxygenated blood to the lungs through its upper chambers and the heart pumps out richly-oxygenated blood from the lungs through its lower chambers to the rest of the body. For Brother Charles, taking in or imitating Jesus is to be a disciple with the heart and mind of Jesus. Discipleship is not the end in itself but it naturally overflows into and essentially qualifies mission - to bring Jesus' love to the poorest of this world with the heart of Jesus that consumes him. "With all my strength I try to show and prove to these poor lost brethren that our religion is all charity, all fraternity, and that its emblem is a heart". This desire turned into daily martyrdom gradually made him a "universal brother". Allowing himself to be shaped by the heart of Christ, he sought to shelter the whole of suffering humanity in his fraternal heart: "Our heart, like that of Jesus, must embrace all men and women".

So, here we are, missionary disciples of Jesus of Nazareth in the footsteps of St. Charles de Foucauld, as we professed in Cebu in 2019. May we be leaven in the dough of our broken yet restored-to-original-goodness humanity. Together, we walk as fellow pilgrims of hope that at the very core of our earthly journey, we go back to the original design of the Creator that a grain of wheat that falls to the earth and dies, it bears much fruit for the Kingdom.



Your little brother,

Eric