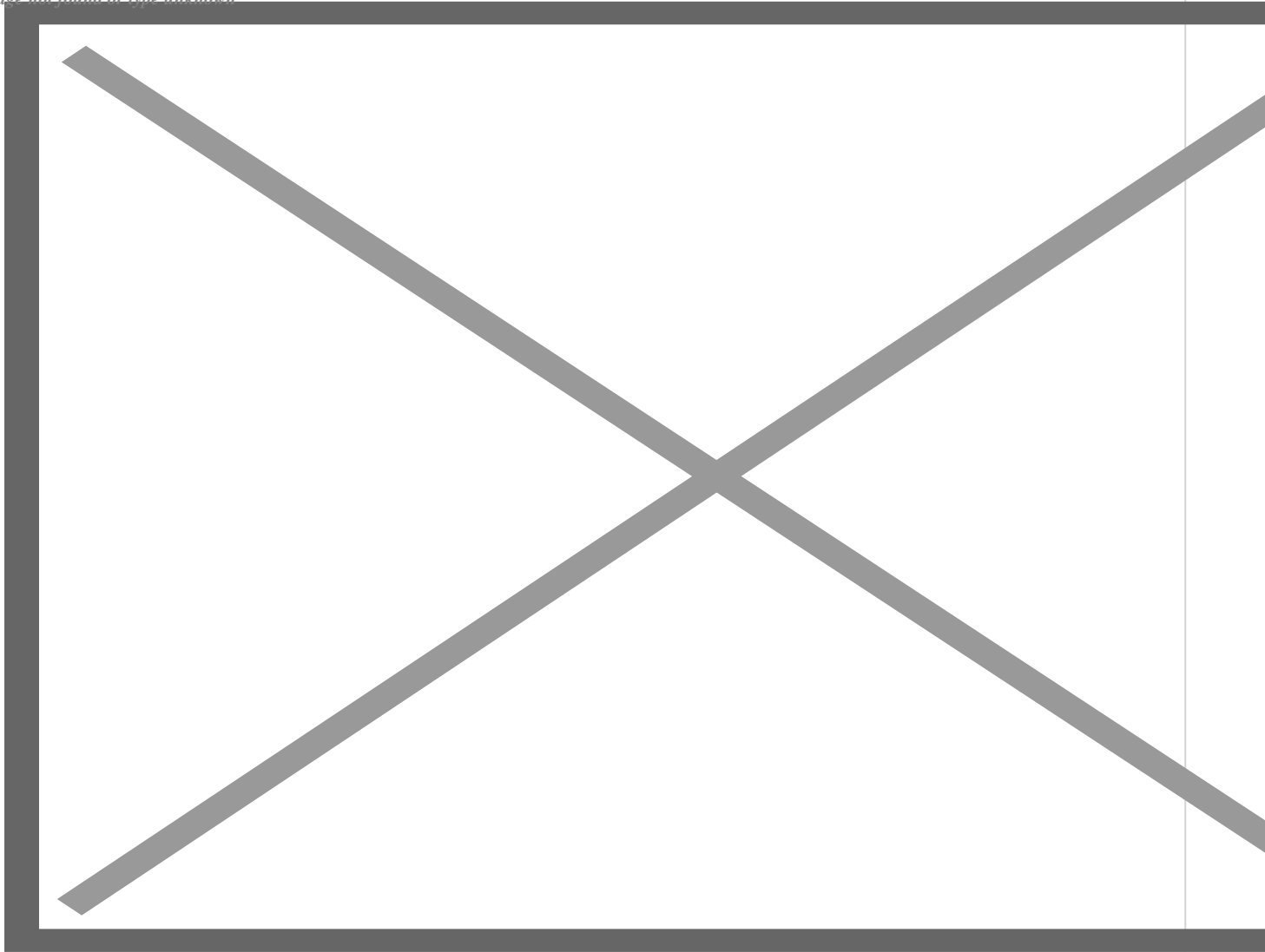


Pope Francis calls for dialogue to heal a divided world

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P?ope Francis calls for dialogue to heal a divided world?

Vatican City, December 25 (RHC)-- Pope Francis has used his Christmas message to decry increasing polarisation in personal and international relationships, saying only dialogue can resolve conflicts ranging from family feuds to threats of war.

In his “Urbi et Orbi” (To the City and the World) message delivered on Saturday, Christmas Day, the head of the Catholic Church called on individuals and world leaders to talk to each other rather than dig in their heels, a distancing he said has been worsened by the coronavirus pandemic.

“Our capacity for social relationships is sorely tried; there is a growing tendency to withdraw, to do it all by ourselves, to stop making an effort to encounter others and do things together,” Francis said from the central balcony of St Peter’s Basilica in a wet and windy Rome.

“On the international level too, there is the risk of avoiding dialogue, the risk that this complex crisis will lead to taking shortcuts rather than setting out on the longer paths of dialogue. Yet only those paths can lead to the resolution of conflicts and to lasting benefits for all.”

Pope Francis, who turned 85 last week, listed conflicts, tensions or crises in Syria, Yemen, Israel, Palestine, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine, Sudan, South Sudan and elsewhere. “We continue to witness a great number of conflicts, crises and disagreements,” he said, speaking from the same balcony where he first appeared to the world as pope after his election in March 2013.

“These never seem to end, by now we hardly even notice them. We have become so used to them that immense tragedies are now being passed over in silence; we risk not hearing the cry of pain and distress of so many of our brothers and sisters,” he said, speaking to an unusually small crowd reduced by COVID-19 restrictions and the weather to only a few thousand.

Francis used the word “dialogue” 11 times in a speech of little more than two pages as he spoke to people huddled under rain parkas and umbrellas. He asked people not to be indifferent to the plight of refugees, migrants, the displaced, political prisoners and female victims of violence, and urged leaders to protect the environment for future generations.

In his Christmas Eve Mass on Friday night in St Peter’s Basilica, Francis said that people who are indifferent to the poor offend God, and urged all to “look beyond all the lights and decorations” and remember the neediest.

Pope Francis also prayed in particular for those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including women and children who have suffered increased abuse during lockdowns. He prayed for “consolation and warmth” for older adults who are alone, as well as for health care workers who “generously devote themselves” to caring for the sick.

“Grant health to the infirm and inspire all men and women of good will to seek the best ways possible to overcome the current health crisis and its effects,” Francis said. For the second day in a row, Italy on Friday set a daily pandemic record with 50,599 new cases. Another 141 people died, bringing Italy’s official coronavirus death toll to 136,386.

Worldwide, COVID-19 has claimed the lives of more than five million people since the pandemic first erupted in late 2019.

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