



Dear Muslim brothers and sisters,

We at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue are glad to offer you our fraternal good wishes for a month rich in divine blessings and spiritual advancement. Fasting, along with prayer, almsgiving and other pious practices, brings us closer to God our Creator and to all those with whom we live and work, and helps us to continue walking together on the path of fraternity.

During these long months of suffering, anguish and sorrow, especially during the lockdown periods, we sensed our need for divine assistance, but also for expressions and gestures of fraternal solidarity: a telephone call, a message of support and comfort, a prayer, help in buying medicines or food, advice, and, to put it simply, the security of knowing that someone is always there for us in times of necessity.

The divine assistance that we need and seek, especially in circumstances like those of the current pandemic, is manifold: God's mercy, pardon, providence and other spiritual and material gifts. Yet, what we need most in these times, is hope. At this time, then, we think it fitting to share with you some reflections on this virtue.

As we are aware, hope, while certainly including optimism, goes beyond it. While optimism is a human attitude, hope has its basis in something religious: God loves us, and therefore cares for us through his providence. He does this in his own mysterious ways, which are not always comprehensible to us. In these situations, we are like children who are certain of the loving care of their parents, but are not yet able to comprehend its full extent.

Hope arises from our belief that all our problems and trials have a meaning, a value and a purpose, however difficult or impossible it may be for us to understand the reason for them or to find a way out of them.

Hope also carries with it belief in the goodness present in the heart of every person. Many times, in situations of difficulty and despair, help, and the hope it brings, can come from those whom we least expect.

Human fraternity, in its numerous manifestations, thus becomes a source of hope for all, especially for those in any kind of need. Thanks be to God our Creator, and to our fellow men and women, for the quick response and generous solidarity shown by believers and also persons of good will with no religious affiliation in times of disaster, whether natural or man-made, like conflicts and wars. All these persons and their goodness remind us believers that the spirit of fraternity is universal, and that it transcends all boundaries: ethnic, religious, social and economic. In adopting this spirit, we imitate God, who looks benevolently upon the humanity he created, upon all other creatures and upon the entire universe. This is why the growing care and concern for the planet, our "common home", is, according to Pope Francis, yet another sign of hope.

We are also aware that hope has its enemies: lack of faith in God's love and care; loss of trust in our brothers and sisters; pessimism; despair and its opposite, unfounded presumption; unfair generalizations based on one's own negative experiences, and so forth. These harmful thoughts, attitudes and reactions must be effectively countered, so as to strengthen hope in God and trust in all our brothers and sisters.

In his recent Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis speaks frequently of hope. There he tells us: "I invite everyone to renewed hope, 'for hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfilment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile' (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 1). Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope" (No. 55).

We, Christians and Muslims, are called to be bearers of hope, for the present life and for the life to come, and to be witnesses, restorers and builders of this hope, especially for those experiencing difficulties and despair.

As a sign of our spiritual fraternity, we assure you of our prayer, and we send best wishes for a peaceful and fruitful Ramadan, and for a joyful 'Id al-Fitr.

From the Vatican, 29 March 2021

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