

## Pope's World Day of Peace message: 'We are all in debt to God' - Summary

In his message for the 58th World Day of Peace marked on 1 January, Pope Francis reflects on the central theme of the upcoming Jubilee of Hope and reiterates his pressing appeal for debt forgiveness, reminding us that we are all "debtors" to God and one another.

By Lisa Zengarini

Hope has been a constant theme in all of Pope Francis' World Day of Peace messages. This is all the more true in his message for the 58th World Day of Peace, which will be marked on 1 January 2025, as the Church begins the Jubilee of Hope amid an unprecedented combination of challenges facing the world today.

### "Forgive us our trespasses"

This year's message is entitled *"Forgive Us Our Debts: Grant Us Your Peace"* underscoring the deep meaning of the Jubilee tradition that reminds us that we are all "in debt" to God, who in His infinite mercy and love forgives our sins and calls upon us to forgive those who trespass against us.

Recalling that in the Jewish tradition, the Jubilee was a special year of universal remission of sins and debts liberating the oppressed, the Pope notes that in our day too, this special year of grace "is an event that inspires us to seek to establish the liberating justice of God in our world," marred by injustices and "systemic" challenges that Saint John Paul II termed "structures of sin."

### Systemic injustices and "interconnected" challenges

The Pope cites the inhuman treatment inflicted on migrants, environmental degradation, "the confusion wilfully created by disinformation, the refusal to engage in any form of dialogue, and the immense resources spent on the industry of war."

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These "interconnected" challenges, Pope Francis argues, demand not "sporadic acts of philanthropy" but "cultural and structural changes" to "break the bonds of injustice and to proclaim God's justice."

### Resources of the earth are God's gift to all humanity

Referencing Saint Basil of Caesarea, the Pope reminds us that everything we claim as our own is, in fact, a gift from God and that therefore the resources of the earth are intended for the benefit of all humanity, "not just a privileged few."

By losing sight of our relationship with God, he says, human interactions become tainted by the logic of exploitation and oppression, "where might makes right."

This mirrors the dynamics of *elites* in Jesus' time, who thrived on the suffering of the poor and finds resonance in today's globalized world, which perpetuates injustices as showcased by the debt crisis trapping poorer nations in the Global South in a vicious circle of dependency and inequality.

### Foreign debt a means of control by richer nations

Indeed, the Pope observes, "Foreign debt has become a means of control whereby certain governments and private financial institutions of the richer countries unscrupulously and indiscriminately exploit the human and natural resources of poorer countries, simply to satisfy the demands of their own markets."

In addition, "different peoples, already burdened by international debt, find themselves also forced to bear the burden of the 'ecological debt' incurred by the more developed countries."

In the spirit of this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis therefore reiterates his plea for the international community to work towards forgiving foreign debt in recognition of the ecological debt existing between the North and the South of this world. "This is an appeal for solidarity, but above all for justice," he emphasizes.

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As a pathway of hope during the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis offers three proposals, keeping in mind that "we are debtors whose debts have been forgiven."

### **Plea for debt forgiveness**

First, he renews the appeal launched by Saint John Paul II on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 to consider substantial reductions or the outright cancellation of international debts of countries "that are in no condition to repay the amount they owe," also in light of the ecological debt the more prosperous countries owe them.

This, he says, should be done in a "new financial framework," leading to the creation of a global financial charter "based on solidarity and harmony between peoples."

### **Appeal for abolition of death penalty**

The Pope then asks for "a firm commitment to respect the dignity of human life from conception to natural death" and calls for the abolition of the death penalty and promoting a culture of life that values every individual.

### **Less money for weapons, more for development**

Following in the footsteps of Saint Paul VI and Benedict XVI, Pope Francis reiterates his appeal to divert "at least a fixed percentage of the money" earmarked for armaments towards a global fund to eradicate hunger and foster sustainable development in poorer nations, helping them combat climate change.

"Hope overflows in generosity; it is free of calculation, makes no hidden demands, is unconcerned with gain, but aims at one thing alone: to raise up those who have fallen, to heal hearts that are broken and to set us free from every kind of bondage.," he writes.

*"Generosity raises up those who have fallen, heals hearts that are broken and sets us free from every kind of bondage."*

### **Disarming hearts**

The overarching goal of these proposals is the attainment of true and lasting peace in the world, which is not merely the absence of war but a profound transformation of hearts and societies.

True peace, the Pope says, is granted by God to hearts that are "disarmed" of selfishness, hostility, and anxiety for the future, replacing them with generosity, forgiveness, and hope for a better world: "May we seek the true peace that is granted to God by hearts disarmed."

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Simple acts of kindness and solidarity, he notes, can pave the way for this new world, fostering a deeper sense of fraternity and shared humanity.

Concluding his message, Pope Francis offers the following prayer for peace:

*Forgive us our trespasses, Lord,*

*as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

*In this cycle of forgiveness, grant us your peace,*

*the peace that you alone can give*

*to those who let themselves be disarmed in heart,*

*to those who choose in hope to forgive the debts of their brothers and sisters,*

*to those who are unafraid to confess their debt to you,*

*and to those who do not close their ears to the cry of the poor.*