



## Signs of Hope for the Poor

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### *Abstract*

This paper explores the themes of hope, solidarity, and service to the poor in light of the upcoming 2025 Jubilee and the fourth centenary of the Congregation of the Mission. Drawing inspiration from Pope Francis' call to be "Pilgrims of Hope," it emphasizes the need for universal fraternity and the Church's mission to address poverty, injustice, and marginalization. The intertwining of hope and patience is discussed as a foundation for Christian life, linking it to Vincentian spirituality's prophetic, synodal, and missionary dimensions. The imagery of hands—for bread and for prayer—highlights the Church's dual role in both tangible service and spiritual support for the poor. St. Vincent de Paul's vision of seeing Christ in the suffering is revisited, reaffirming that prayer and action are inseparable. The paper calls for renewed commitment to mercy and fraternity, embodying the Jubilee's invitation to hope, justice, and love.

Cet article explore les thèmes de l'espérance, de la solidarité et du service aux pauvres à la lumière du prochain Jubilé 2025 et du quatrième centenaire de la Congrégation de la Mission. S'inspirant de l'appel du pape François à être des « pèlerins de l'espérance », il met l'accent sur la nécessité d'une fraternité universelle et sur la mission de l'Église de s'attaquer à la pauvreté, à l'injustice et à la marginalisation. L'entrelacement de l'espérance et de la patience est discuté comme un fondement de la vie chrétienne, en le reliant aux dimensions prophétique, synodale et missionnaire de la spiritualité vinentienne. L'image des mains - pour le pain et pour la prière - souligne le double rôle de l'Église dans le service tangible et le soutien spirituel aux pauvres. La vision de saint Vincent de Paul, qui consiste à voir le Christ dans la souffrance, est revisitée, réaffirmant que la prière et l'action sont inséparables. Le document appelle à un engagement renouvelé en faveur de la miséricorde et de la fraternité, incarnant l'invitation du Jubilé à l'espérance, à la justice et à l'amour.

Este artículo explora los temas de la esperanza, la solidaridad y el servicio a los pobres a la luz del próximo Jubileo de 2025 y del cuarto centenario de la Congregación de la Misión. Inspirándose en el llamamiento del papa Francisco a ser «peregrinos de la esperanza», hace hincapié en la necesidad de la fraternidad universal y en la misión de la Iglesia de hacer frente a la pobreza, la injusticia y la marginación. Se analiza el entrelazamiento de la esperanza y la paciencia como fundamento de la vida cristiana, vinculándolo a las dimensiones profética, sinodal y misionera de la espiritualidad vinentiana. La imagen de las manos —para el pan y para la oración— destaca el doble papel de la Iglesia en el servicio tangible y el apoyo espiritual a los pobres. Se revisa la visión de San Vicente de Paúl de ver a Cristo en los que sufren, reafirmando que la oración y la acción son inseparables. El documento pide un compromiso renovado con la misericordia y la fraternidad, encarnando la invitación del Jubileo a la esperanza, la justicia y el amor.

**Keywords:** Hope, Bread, Poor, Hands

### **1. Hands for Bread. Signs of hope for the poor**



After the great Jubilee of the year 2000, which with John Paul II brought the Church into the third millennium of her history, we have experienced the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (December 8, 2015 - November 20, 2016), desired by Pope Francis, which has allowed us to rediscover the power and tenderness of the merciful love of the Father, so as to be witnesses of it in our turn. More recently, Pope Bergoglio himself, on February 11, 2022, wrote a letter to Monsignor Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, entrusting to him the responsibility of "finding the right way so that the Holy Year (2025 Jubilee) can be prepared and celebrated with intense faith, lively hope and active charity."

The experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, which "has changed our way of life, has at times raised doubts, fear and bewilderment in our souls," can be overcome, Francis writes, "to the extent that we act with active solidarity," keeping the torch of hope burning. "The upcoming Jubilee - the Pope continues - can greatly help to restore a climate of hope and trust, as a sign of a new rebirth that we all perceive as urgent." So here is the motto: *Pilgrims of Hope*. "All this will be possible if we are able to recover a sense of universal fraternity, if we do not close our eyes to the tragedy of rampant poverty that prevents millions of men, women, young people and children from living in a humanly dignified way. I am thinking especially of the many refugees who are forced to leave their lands. May the voices of the poor be heard in this time of preparation for the Jubilee which, according to the biblical mandate, restores to everyone access to the fruits of the earth."

After the year of 2023, dedicated to reflection on the documents and the study of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council, 2024 is the year of prayer, a *great "symphony" of prayer that translates into solidarity and sharing of daily bread*, thus making *Our Father* the program of our life.

In 2025 the Vincentian Missionaries will also celebrate the fourth centenary of the founding of the Congregation of the Mission. For this goal we are preparing with prayer and commitment to the mission to revitalize the three dimensions of our Vincentian spirituality, as indicated to us by the Superior General, Fr. Tomaž Mavrič, who writes: "*the prophetic dimension*, which from the grace of the Spirit of God who is 'above us', comes to listening to the cry of the poor and availability for attention; the *synodal dimension* that sees the overcoming of individualism for a community journey and action; the *missionary dimension* whose authenticity comes from a deep spirituality, intense communion, closeness and friendship with Jesus."

For everyone, 2025 is "a year of the Lord's grace, and we will thank God for the grace granted to all the faithful through the Jubilee, and we will try to prepare ourselves well to acquire it" (SVit XI, 333). A path, marked by stages, towards the Holy Year. A path to walk together, exercising ourselves to recover the awareness of being all *sinodoi*, companions on the journey, that is to say, *synodal*.

### **Hope does not disappoint**

"*Spes non confundit*", "hope does not disappoint". With these words of the Apostle Paul (*Rom 5:5*), Pope Francis, on May 9, 2024, presented the Bull announcing the Ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025, which is intended to be an opportunity for everyone, but in particular for those inhabited by skepticism and pessimism, to revive hope sustained by God-love. Hope - Pope Francis writes - is born of love and is founded on the love that flows from the Heart of Jesus pierced on the Cross.

A virtue closely related to hope is *patience*. In a social context where haste has become a constant, where space and time are supplanted by the "here and now", we are called to rediscover patience understood as the ability to wait with confidence without forgetting the patience that God has with us.

From this intertwining of hope and patience it is clear how the Christian life is *a journey in search of the meaning of life*; it is not by chance that *the pilgrimage* expresses a fundamental element of every Jubilee event.

The 2025 Ordinary Jubilee will begin on December 24, 2024 with the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. It will end on January 6, 2026 and will lead the way to another fundamental anniversary for all Christians: the two thousandth anniversary of the Redemption accomplished through the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus will be celebrated in 2033.

The Pope asks all Christians to be tangible signs of hope for those living in difficult situations: *prisoners* who, deprived of their freedom, experience every day, in addition to the harshness of imprisonment, emotional emptiness, imposed restrictions and, in not a few cases, disrespect; the *sick*, who are at home or in hospital; *young people*, who often see their dreams crumble; *migrants*, who leave their lands in search of a better life for themselves and their families; the *exiled, refugees, and fugitives*, who are forced by controversial international events to flee to avoid war, violence and discrimination; the *elderly*, who often experience loneliness and a sense of abandonment; the billions of *poor*, who often lack the necessities of life.

Pope Francis had already taken up the theme of hope in 2019, writing the message for the third World Day of the Poor entitled: "The hope of the poor will never be disappointed" (*Ps 9:19*). The Lord God listens, intervenes, protects, defends, redeems, saves, does not forget the cry of the poor whose hope defies the various conditions of death, because they know they are particularly loved by God and this love overcomes suffering and exclusion. The poor - continues the Pontiff - is he who "trusts in the Lord", because he has the certainty of never being abandoned, he is the man of trust!

St. Vincent de Paul was convinced of this when he told the Daughters of Charity that "hope produces trust.... We must believe that God wants to give us all the graces necessary to save us. Therefore, whoever does not believe that God takes care of our salvation through the ways that his Providence considers suitable for us, offends him. Not to be firm in hope and not to believe that he takes care of our eternal salvation is a distrust that displeases him. Hope consists, then, in expecting from the divine goodness the fulfillment of the promises he has made to us. There is, then, confidence in Providence. Trust and hope are almost the same thing. To trust in Providence means to hope that God will take care of those who serve him, as a bridegroom takes care of his bride and a father takes care of his son. God takes care of us in the same way, or rather, much more" (*SVit X, 502-503*).

## **Hands for Bread**

The fourth centenary of the founding of the Congregation of the Mission is, not only for the Missionaries but for the whole Church, an opportunity for all believers to rekindle the awareness of being a sign of hope for the poor. Yes, that's right! We are all

a sign of hope for the poor, we are all an extension of God's action, we are all called to perform "divine actions."

I propose to you a painting on canvas. "*Hands for Bread*", by the Bosnian artist who fled the siege of Sarajevo during the Balkan war in the 1990s, Safet Zec<sup>1</sup>. The artist depicts arms and hands desperately stretched out to the point of exhaustion to ask for help, justice, freedom, mercy. It is around bread that we rediscover ourselves as brothers, humanity that lives, strives, hopes, rejoices.

In these hands we contemplate the poor who seek bread... bread of justice, of work, of love. We also contemplate our hands, our arms whose weariness, together with the sweat of our brow, testifies to our love for God (cf. *SVit XI*, 40).

In the bread we also contemplate the work of the poor: "We live from the inheritance of Jesus Christ and thanks to the sweat of the poor. When we go to the refectory we must always ask ourselves: "Have I earned the food I am about to eat? I am often assailed by this thought that confuses me: "Wretched man, have you earned the bread you are eating? That bread comes from the work of the poor! If we do not earn it as they do, let us at least pray for their needs. The poor feed us. Let us pray to God for them, and let not a day pass without our offering them to the Lord, that he may give them the grace to make good use of their sufferings" (*SVit XI*, 201).

The time has probably come for a *cultural revolution* that begins by sharing what we are and what we have for the advent of a new fraternity.

## **Mercy, the embrace to begin anew**

Pope Francis, in the Bull announcing the Holy Year 2025, recalled an important element in the celebration of the Jubilee: the plenary indulgence that allows us to discover how boundless God's mercy is. "Precisely the sacrament of Penance represents for all of us a great opportunity to heal the heart, embrace ourselves, get up and start again. Forgiven we are called to forgive, to allow others also to experience the embrace and to start over."

God's mercy is the wonderful news, it is the heart of the Vincentian mission. The parable of the Good Samaritan shows us how the oil (*elaion*) with which he anointed the wounds, according to a Greek pun, contained God's compassion (*eleos*). In the man who fell among the bandits I see the peasant of Gannes who fell into the sin that held him prisoner to himself, and in the Good Samaritan I see St. Vincent and all believers pouring on every man and woman the oil of consolation and the wine of hope, through care and mercy.

Preparation for the Jubilee should be animated by the desire to approach *with full confidence before the throne of grace, to receive mercy and find grace and to be helped in time of need* (*Heb 4:16*) to experience the tenderness of an embrace.

May love and mercy be for everyone *a path that leads from the heart to the hands*.

## **2. Hands for prayer. The prayer of the poor rises up to God**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://images.app.goo.gl/QRNiLXTJPFcw>

In 2017, Pope Francis instituted the *World Day of the Poor*, intending it to be the whole Church's response to the poor (pain, marginalization, oppression, violence, torture, prison and war, deprivation of freedom and dignity, ignorance and illiteracy, health emergency and lack of work, trafficking and slavery, exile and misery), so that they would not think that their cry fell into a vacuum. These are the themes of the World Days of the Poor:

- Let us love, not with words but with deeds (2017)
- This poor man cried and the Lord heard him (2018)
- The hope of the poor shall not perish for ever (2019)
- Stretch forth your hand to the poor (2020)
- The poor you will always have with you (2021)
- For your sakes Christ became poor (2022)
- Do not turn your face from anyone who is poor (2023)

On June 13, 2024, on the liturgical memorial of St. Anthony of Padua, patron saint of the poor, Pope Francis sent to the universal Church a beautiful message for the VIII World Day of the Poor, entitled: ***“The prayer of the poor reaches up to God”*** (Sir 21:5). The biblical text highlights how the poor have a privileged place in God's heart, so much so that, in the face of their suffering, God is “impatient” until he has done them justice. No one, absolutely no one, is excluded from his heart!

The *World Day of the Poor* has become an annual event that invites every believer and every community to listen to the prayer of the poor, becoming aware of their presence and their needs. Listening to the poor also means being disciples of the poor; yes, we can go to the school of the poor! In a culture that has put wealth first and often sacrifices the dignity of people on the altar of material goods, they go against the current, stressing that what is essential for life is something else.

In his message, Pope Francis invites us, on the way to the Holy Year 2025, to take care of “the small details of love” in daily fidelity: to stop, to approach, to pay a little attention, a smile, a caress, a word of comfort.

One aspect that, in my opinion, is very important is mentioned in n. 5 of the Pope's message: prayer. “We need to make the prayer of the poor our own and pray together with them. It is a challenge we must accept and a pastoral action that needs to be nourished. In fact, the worst discrimination suffered by the poor is the lack of spiritual care. The vast majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God, and we cannot fail to offer them His friendship, His blessing, His Word, the celebration of the Sacraments and the proposal of a path of growth and maturation in faith. The preferential option for the poor must be translated primarily into a privileged and priority religious attention”.

## **Hands for prayer**

The fourth centenary of the founding of the Congregation of the Mission is, not only for Vincentian missionaries, but for the whole Church and for all believers, an invitation to prayer, to have hands for prayer.

In this second reflection, I also propose to you a painting on canvas, *Man in Prayer*, by the Bosnian artist Safet Zec, who fled the siege of Sarajevo during the Balkan

war in the 1990<sup>2</sup>. The artist portrays a man who, precisely in prayer, finds light and hope in the darkness.

This image can be accompanied by the biblical iconography of the healing of the deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:32-37): “*Jesus took him aside, away from the crowd, put his fingers in his ears and touched his tongue with spittle; then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, ‘Ephphatha’, that is, ‘Be opened.’*”

The biblical text reveals that the profound link between love of God and love of neighbor must also enter into our prayer. In Jesus, true God and true man, attention to the other, especially if he is in need and suffering, leads him to turn to the Father, in that fundamental relationship that guides his whole life. But it also happens the other way around: communion with the Father, constant dialogue with Him, impels Jesus to be attentive in a unique way to the concrete situations of man, in order to bring them the consolation and love of God. The relationship with man leads us to the relationship with God, and the relationship with God leads us back to our neighbor.

### **Vincent de Paul, between service and prayer**

Vincent, touched by his closeness to the poor, looked at them with a theological gaze, that is, the gaze that God has shown himself to have towards the people of the covenant, reduced to miserable conditions in the history of salvation: the understanding gaze of merciful love, which was unequivocally revealed in the gaze with which Jesus caressed sinners, the unfortunate and the weak.

The poor became for Vincent the most sensitive point of his conscience, in whose contact his spirit vibrated. Jean Calvet (one of his biographers) writes: “*He felt and believed that really, without metaphor, the beggar, the ragged one, was his brother. If every day he made two poor people from the street sit at his table and wanted to serve them himself, it was because he saw in them Jesus Christ, but first of all because he saw in them his brothers. And since they were unfortunate brothers, he thought they deserved this particular look: he considered them his “lords and masters”*”.<sup>3</sup>

Translating in another language one of his exhortations in favor of the poor, we can hear him again in these words: “*Look at the poor, look at them well. They are rough, disfigured by pain and hunger. They are dirty. They are barely human in appearance. And yet, turn the coin over and you will see in them the image of the Son of God, who in His passion on the cross assumed that disfigured and humiliated face*”.<sup>4</sup>

To Vincent, each poor person was a face full of history. A face to be deciphered and loved with tenderness and cordiality, recognizing the very mystery of the God who became man and shared human suffering.

In this regard, I recall a text taken from the Rules of the Women's Charity of Montmirail, where Vincent educates in service and prayer: “*On entering the house of a sick person she will greet him kindly, then, approaching the bed with a modestly cheerful face, she will invite him to eat, will arrange the pillow, will arrange the blanket, will put the little table, the tablecloth, the plate, the spoon, will clean the bowl, will serve the soup, put the meat in the saucer, have the sick person bless the food and drink the soup, cut the meat into small pieces, help him to eat by saying some holy and cheerful words of comfort*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://images.app.goo.gl/znhfucEjR9MEq>

<sup>3</sup> J. Calvet, *La littérature religieuse de François de Sales à Fénelon*, Paris 1938, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Cf SVit X, 26.

to encourage him, serve him a drink, invite him again to eat. Finally, when he has finished the meal, after washing the dishes and the cutlery, she will fold the tablecloth and remove the small table, she will make the sick person say the prayer of thanksgiving and then she will greet him to go and serve someone else”.<sup>5</sup>

Let us not forget that the poor, the people, the “things to do” did not distract Vincent's heart from his experience of God in prayer: *Dedicated continually to prayer, he was not distracted either by the contemplation of the divine mysteries, or by people, or by affairs, or by happy or sad things: in fact, he always had God present in his mind, and with great effort and holy strategies he had succeeded in making everything that came before his eyes remind him of his Creator; expressing in his own way the glory of God and the divine praises, they impelled him to the contemplation of heavenly beauty. That is why he was always modest, meek, docile and benevolent, preserving in all things a wonderful serenity of spirit: he was neither exalted by happy things nor disturbed by adversities, since he could say with the prophet: “I always have God before my eyes because He is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken”*.<sup>6</sup>

May the Lord grant us the capacity for ever more intense prayer, to strengthen our personal relationship with God the Father, to expand our hearts towards the needs of those around us and to feel the beauty of being “brothers in the Son” (*Lumen gentium*, 62) in order to build fraternity and social friendship (*Fratelli tutti*, 6).

### **3. Hands for peace. For an unarmed heart**

On the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, December 8, 2024, Pope Francis addressed the entire Church with a profound message for the 58th World Day of Peace, to be celebrated on January 1, 2025, titled “*Forgive Us Our Debts, Grant Us Your Peace*.”

The theme resonates deeply with the biblical and ecclesial significance of the Jubilee Year, drawing inspiration particularly from the encyclicals *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli tutti*, and emphasizing the concepts of Hope and Forgiveness, which lie at the heart of the Jubilee. It is a call to conversion—not for condemnation but for reconciliation and peace.

In 2025, the Catholic Church celebrates the Jubilee, a time to fill hearts with hope. Instead of the trumpet blast that traditionally marks the beginning of the Year of Grace, the Pope invites us to hear the “desperate cry for help” rising from so many parts of the world (cf. Gn 4:10), a cry that God never fails to hear.

Pope Francis urges us to confront the current conditions of injustice and inequality through cultural and structural change, recognizing ourselves as children of the same Father—debtors to one another and essential to each other.

In the “Our Father,” Jesus leaves us with the challenging petition: “as we forgive our debtors,” after asking the Father to forgive our debts (cf. Mt 6:12). To forgive others’ debts and give them hope, our lives must be filled with the same hope that flows from God’s mercy (*n. 10*).

The Pope outlines three concrete actions on the path of hope to restore dignity to the lives of entire peoples and guide them back toward peace:

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<sup>5</sup> *SVit XI*, 475.

<sup>6</sup> Bull of canonization of St. Vincent de Paul, June 16, 1737.



- Reduction or complete cancellation of international debt.
- Respect for the dignity of human life, from conception to natural death.
- Creation of a Global Fund to permanently eradicate hunger.

Only through these measures can we draw closer to the goal of peace. The message concludes with this aspiration:

“May 2025 be a year when peace grows. A true and lasting peace that is not confined to the technicalities of contracts or human negotiations. Let us seek the true peace that God grants to a disarmed heart: a heart that does not insist on calculating what is mine and what is yours; a heart that dissolves selfishness in the willingness to meet others; a heart that does not hesitate to acknowledge itself as indebted to God and, therefore, is ready to forgive the debts that burden others; a heart that overcomes discouragement about the future with the hope that every person is a resource for this world” (n. 13).

### **Hands for peace**

The 400th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation of the Mission is not only a celebration for the Vincentian Missionaries but also an invitation to the entire Church and all believers to embrace peace, to disarm their hearts, and to have hands for peace.

In this reflection, as we approach the major celebrations of the Congregation’s fourth centenary, I invite you to contemplate the painting *Mother with Child* (2024) by Bosnian artist Safet Zec, who fled Sarajevo during the Balkan War in the 1990<sup>7</sup>.

The painting portrays a fleeing woman carrying her child in her arms. Her dark brown hair is painted almost hastily, with essential brushstrokes, while her downward gaze dramatically observes the small child wrapped in a cloth. The colors are few and fundamental, reflecting the urgency of escape: the ochre of the woman’s skin and cloak, the white of the child’s garments and wrappings, and the red staining her wrists and clothing, seeping into the ground. Only the blue of the child’s shoe, peeking out from the wrappings, evokes the vitality and carefree spirit every child should have. The sanctity of life is concentrated in the large hands cradling the small, wrapped body—hands that defend to the last breath, hands that bleed for a life continually violated by the brutality of war.

### **We are tired of war! We need peace!**

Currently, there are 56 active conflicts worldwide—the highest number recorded since the end of World War II, according to the Global Peace Index 2024.

Peace is the horizon where humanity is called to live in fraternal communion and relationship with God and His Envoy, the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5). It is the central message of the messianic hope proclaimed by the prophets, who envisioned its fulfillment in the original harmony between humanity and creation:

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb... the calf and the lion shall graze together, and a little child shall lead them” (Is 11:6-9; cf. Is 65:25).

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<sup>7</sup> <https://images.app.goo.gl/LMJzoNLGPspEXKnG9>



It is also reflected in the transformation of instruments of war into tools of progress and peaceful coexistence:

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks... they shall learn war no more” (Is 2:4).

All this is fulfilled with the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, whose birth marks the dawn and triumph of peace:

“Peace on earth to those whom the Lord loves” (Lk 2:14).

### **We desire peace born of forgiveness**

Let us remember that “mercy is the summary word of the Gospel; we can say it is the ‘face’ of Christ, the face He showed when meeting everyone, healing the sick, dining with sinners, and, above all, forgiving from the cross: there we see the face of divine mercy.”

It is essential to rediscover ourselves as forgiven by God in Christ, for this transforms the act of forgiving: it is no longer merely an effort of the will but an openness to the gift of God’s grace.

We desire a peace that is not only the silence of arms but also the deep harmony realized in individuals, relationships, and social groups when they follow the laws of Life and remain in tune with God’s action.

Peace cannot merely be wished for—it must be proclaimed, built, and lived.

### **Vincent de Paul: messenger with “beautiful feet”**

*“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace!” (Is 52:7).*

I like to imagine Vincent de Paul as a man with “beautiful feet,” taking good steps. His feet, worn from travel and perhaps aching, were the instruments that allowed him to announce peace. For this, they are beautiful and precious. Thanks to them, the longing for peace and liberation is fulfilled and brings forth joy.

Thus: *beautiful the feet* of Vincent who went to the bedside of the dying in Folleville, *beautiful the feet* of Vincent who went to the home of the needy family in Châtillon, *beautiful the feet* of Vincent who visited the prisoners in Paris, *beautiful the feet* of Vincent who went to Cardinal Richelieu and said: “Give us peace, have mercy on us, give peace to our land”; *beautiful the feet* of Vincent who cared for the abandoned children, *beautiful the feet* of Vincent on the paths of mission and charity; *beautiful his feet!*

Vincent, a messenger of peace, always sought to alleviate personal discord and family conflicts; he worked to calm disputes between ecclesiastics and heretics; in social conflicts, he defended justice against any abuse and always condemned the use of violence; he lived the Gospel of charity starting with the “feet,” that is, as a nomad and pilgrim in 17th-century France, and continues today through our “feet” around the world.

May the Lord grant us the grace to be artisans of peace, ready to initiate processes of healing and reconciliation with creativity and courage (*Fratelli tutti*, 225).

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