

Franciscans International – 30th Anniversary Celebration
Geneva, Switzerland – March 16, 2019
Mass – Homily

It is written in the Sacred Scriptures:

*But I say to you, love your enemies,
and pray for those who persecute you,
that you may be children of your heavenly Father... (Mt. 5:44-45).*

Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.

This is the heart of the message of the Gospel of St. Matthew we have heard proclaimed today in this church, on this 30th Anniversary of the founding of Franciscans International. This also is the same message that is found in the text that immediately precedes dealing with the *Beatitudes*. For St. Matthew, the life and message of Jesus is one of contradiction: it does not follow the logic of this world where it would be considered and even celebrated as normal to respond to violence, oppression, hatred, denigration of human beings and of the planet by making recourse to violence.

It is written in the Preamble to the Founding Charter of the United Nations:

*We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...to reaffirm our faith in fundamental human rights, and the worth of the human person...to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom...
to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours...to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security...[and] to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples... [cf. <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/preamble/index.html>].*

Love of enemy; prayer for those who persecute you. I believe that these biblical words find echo in the Founding Charter of the UN. The invitation to all nations and peoples is to pursue a path where enemies are progressively transformed

into potential friends - or at least potential allies - in the search to promote conditions for the fulfillment of human life: peace, security, mutual respect, and collaboration in promoting conditions for the integral advancement of all people.

Following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, Franciscans International began 30 years ago as a concrete response of Franciscan men and women, religious and lay, who had witness firsthand the consequences of social exclusion, violence, abuse of fundamental human rights. These same Franciscans also recognized that violence leaves no one unscathed: oppressed and oppressor alike. Recognizing the potential for collaboration between the core elements of Franciscan spirituality and its vision of the human person and the natural environment, and the core values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, FI has worked tirelessly to promote a constant dialogue between spiritual and humanistic values seeking strategic areas for joining forces, thus forging bonds of cooperation for the advancement of all peoples and protection of our endangered planet.

The words of the Gospel writer are as relevant today as ever to the mission of Franciscans International, and even to that of the United Nations. They challenge all those who believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, all who self-identify as people of faith, to enter into the 'fray' of the human struggle for life, peace, security, dignity, fundamental rights, and the promotion of a world where all peoples might share in the fruits of the earth. These are not words referring to some unattainable utopian dream having nothing to do with the reality of human existence, its inequalities, its sufferings. Rather, they are prophetic words declaring to all peoples in every age the true destiny of all of human life, human societies, and the natural environment. As Pope Francis reminds us in his first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*:

An authentic faith... always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters" (par. 183).

May God continue to bless FI as it engages in the promotion of the common good, seeking to "seeking to leave this earth somehow better than we found it."