



FRATELLI DELLA CARITÀ . BROTHERS OF CHARITY . BROEDERS VAN LIEFDE . FRÈRES DE LA CHARITÉ

*Che il messaggio d'amore, di pace
e di calda fratellanza
che riceviamo dal presepe
continui a risuonare durante questo nuovo anno*

*May the message of love, peace,
and warm-hearted fraternity
that we receive from the manger
continue to resound throughout the new year*

*Moge de boodschap van liefde, vrede
en warme broederlijkheid
die we vanuit de kribbe ontvangen
blijven klinken gedurende het nieuwe jaar*

*Que le message d'amour, de paix
et de fraternité chaleureuse
que nous recevons de la crèche
continue de résonner
tout au long de la nouvelle année*

Fratelli della Carità
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The Nativity, by Bartolomé Estebán Murillo, ca. 1665-1670, MET, New York



I Fratelli della Carità vi augurano
un Buon Natale e un anno 2022 benedetto

The Brothers of Charity wish you
a blessed Christmas and a happy 2022

De Broeders van Liefde wensen U
een zalig Kerstmis en een gezegend 2022

Les Frères de la Charité vous souhaitent
un Joyeux Noël et une Bonne Année 2022

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Rome, 1 January 2022

Beloved Confreres,
Dear Associate Members,

First of all, we wish you all a blessed and peaceful 2022. Thank you for the many wishes we received and we hope to share with you that blessing and peace in the new year.

I have the habit of writing down a phrase in my diary on the first day of the year, which I then try to carry with me throughout the year. For this year, I have chosen the refrain of a Taizé song: *“The kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* Justice, peace, and joy are sung as ingredients of the kingdom of God and as gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is a short phrase with a strongly condensed message that can really give us an orientation to live by in the new year. Let us pause for a moment to consider these different elements.

When we think about our lives as human beings, as Christians, as religious, we have a general and common vocation to sanctify our lives, to build our lives whole and in harmony, with God, with ourselves, with our neighbours, and with the world around us. It is an invitation to build our lives both horizontally and vertically, with an openness towards the transcendental that surpasses us, and to let the transcendental shine through in our daily lives. This is the “kingdom of God”: a community of men that allows the best in each person to grow and flourish, a community of men that invites and gives each person the opportunity to build their life in accordance with the way in which they were created as human beings: in the image and likeness of God.

We can only build this kingdom of God as a community on the condition that we first allow the kingdom of God to grow within ourselves. This is the first and fundamental task: open yourself to the spiritual dimension in your life, develop this vertical dimension in your life, and take the time to do so. This is perhaps one of the greatest obstacles many people face today: that they no longer take the time and space to allow themselves to be illuminated by the transcendental, missing the necessary silence in life in order to be more contemplative in the world. We live in a time in which noise dominates, in which silence is no longer tolerated, in which we take no or insufficient time to turn inward in peace, so that we no longer hear, cannot hear, and no longer want to hear the voice of God in the depths of our being. It is as if today many have become frightened of silence, of being alone, and want to fill everything with news, sound, being very active. Apparently, we can no longer live without a mobile phone, without those little earpieces, without constantly chatting or texting each other.

If we immediately jump to our charism as Brothers of Charity and receive in it the invitation to let God's love shine in the world, the basic prerequisite is of course that we ourselves should be open to God's love first, let ourselves be shone upon by God's love, and take time and give space to God to make his love alive and present in us. That is our general calling to sanctify our lives. And then we will spontaneously help build the kingdom of God in the world by letting his love shine and radiate. We can only shine and radiate what we have inside of ourselves. We can only propagate what we first hold within ourselves and carry with us. Let us not make it too theoretical, but let us simply try to live authentically and sincerely according to the calling we have received and take the necessary time every day to listen to the Word of God in the silence of our hearts. The rest will take care of itself.

The rest? That is the kingdom of God that, according to the cited passage, takes shape in justice, peace, and joy. First of all, justice, peace, and joy in ourselves, before we can live out this justice, peace, and joy in our relationships with others, in the communities in which we live and work.

Justice is more than mere fairness as it is often interpreted in the world, but the development of a life and a living community in line with the Beatitudes and the whole message delivered by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, it is said that we must hunger and thirst for righteousness: living in truth with ourselves and with others, avoiding any kind of ambiguity and corruption in our actions, truly building structures that respect and promote man in all his dimensions. In other words, to build our lives and the concrete world in which we live in the way that Jesus did and according to the message that resounds in the Gospel. Let us ask ourselves in earnest how far away we often are from this: personally and as a group. At the same time, let us be aware that growing in justice is indeed the result of our own willingness and commitment, but is above all a gift of the Holy Spirit! We are asked to respond to this.

Peace is an emotive word these days, especially when we see how much lack of peace there is around us and how much pain it causes. We need not only look at the many places where actual wars are being waged, but also at the discord that exists in local communities and that is persistently perpetuated. Peace in communities can only grow from the inner peace that is present in the members of these communities. Inner peace is a gift that we receive when we live a spiritual life. When we are truly rooted in the love of God, we receive an inner peace and tranquillity that no one or nothing can take away from us. It is then that we can truly build a peaceful environment, be at peace with our neighbours, and patiently seek how

we can mutually resolve disputes. It will be a peace built on the rock of inner peace and not based on making impossible compromises. Let us take this as a special point of attention during this new year and ask ourselves how, true to our charism as Brothers of Charity and following the Prince of Peace that Christ is and whose mercy we beg for, we can truly grow to become a more peaceful community.

Finally, there is *joy*, which should become the true keynote of our lives, both personally and as a community. There is a great difference between cheap pleasure, which so many pursue today, and the joy that we receive as a gift when we are able to build our lives in true harmony. This is indeed another very real gift of a spiritual life. Joy seems to be the companion of that inner peace; in a peaceful heart, true joy will blossom. Those who think they can find joy in the pursuit of possessions, power, and pleasure, will very quickly run up against a wall of discontent and emptiness. We must dare to ask ourselves what we are really doing, where we are putting the emphasis of our lives, both personally and as a community. Do we not often lose the freedom that is so characteristic of the children of God by clinging to what we own and what we stubbornly try to maintain: structures related to power and possession, a concern for the future in which all trust in divine Providence is absent? Where is the joy of our early religious life? Where is the joy of when we were able to commit without reservation to the good of the poor and the sick? Joy disappears from life when we become self-absorbed and are only concerned with our own certainties, which we insist on holding onto. We forget to live in the here and now, grateful for the past, wholeheartedly forgiving what may have been wrong, and above all faithfully trusting in the future. By contrast, how much joy can we find in a young community that enthusiastically commits itself to caring for the poor and the sick as a contemporary translation of our charism of charity. But how much joy there can also be in a community of older brothers who continue to combine a gentle care for each other with a healthy interest and concern for what is happening around them. Charity knows no age! A community where authentic joy reigns will remain appealing to young people, as well, be sure of that.

Dear confreres and associate members, on this first day of the year, let us dream a little and take a step every day to make some of that dream a reality. We continue to cherish the adage that much, indeed all things, are possible with the grace of God, the support of others, and our own little daily efforts. The only thing we must not do is change the order in this adage and allow God's grace only when all else fails. This is the grace we wish for you before all else!

Fraternally yours in the Lord,



Bro. René Stockman
Superior General
Brothers of Charity