

## Pope Francis on Easter Message

**ROME** - Pope Francis Easter Sunday prayed for those suffering due to either global conflict or the coronavirus, saying Christ's resurrection brings both light and hope to the darkness of an oppressed and suffering world.

"Like a new flame this Good News springs up in the night, the night of a world already faced with epochal challenges and now oppressed by a pandemic severely testing our whole human family," the pope told viewers of his livestreamed *Urbi et Orbi* blessing ("to the city and to the world"), speaking of the global COVID-19 outbreak.

Easter, he said, offers humanity "a different 'contagion,' a message transmitted from heart to heart - for every human heart awaits this Good News. It is the contagion of hope," he said, insisting that it's not a "magic formula" that makes humanity's problems disappear.

The *Urbi et Orbi* is generally a policy speech as well as a blessing and Francis held to form, calling for debt relief for impoverished nations, easing of international sanctions, relief for the unemployed, European solidarity, and an end to armed conflicts, all styled both as a response to the pandemic and an expression of the Easter spirit.

"The resurrection of Christ ... is the victory of love over the root of evil, a victory that does not 'bypass' suffering and death, but passes through them, opening a path in the abyss, transforming evil into good. This is the unique hallmark of the power of God," he said.

Pope Francis spoke during his livestreamed April 12 *Urbi et Orbi* blessing, which he offered for the second time in just a month. Typically only given on Christmas and Easter, this year the pope gave the *Urbi et Orbi* an unprecedented third time on March 27, during a special prayer service for the end of the coronavirus.

Those who receive the blessing either in person or through television or social media receive a plenary indulgence, meaning the full pardon of the temporal consequences of sin.

Francis's blessing was given after celebrating Easter Mass earlier that morning in St. Peter's Basilica.

Easter at the Vatican is widely known for the vast array of bright, colorful flowers that bedeck the altar on the platform where the pope celebrates Mass in St. Peter's Square. This year, however, the Mass took place inside the basilica, at the Altar of the Chair, which sits behind the main altar, due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Instead of an explosion of flowers covering the platform in front of the basilica, there were small bouquets placed around the main altar inside, with large arrangements placed around the altar where Francis celebrated Mass.

Due to the coronavirus, the *Ressurexit* rite was omitted from the Mass. An ancient tradition, the rite takes place at the beginning of Easter Sunday Mass and consists of the pope pausing for a moment of veneration in front of an icon of the Most Holy Savior.

Previously, the image had been kept in a private chapel at the Oratory of Saint Laurence, near the papal basilica of John Lateran, called the *Sancta Sanctorum*. Papal Easter celebrations used to begin there, with the pontiff kissing the feet of Jesus three times and reciting the chant, *Surrexit Dominus de sepulchro, alleluia, Qui pro nobis pependit in ligno, alleluia*, meaning, "The Lord is Risen from the tomb, alleluia, Who for us hung on the wood, alleluia."

Concelebrants at the Mass would then also kiss the icon and offer a sign of peace to the pope. Under John Paul II the rite was incorporated into papal Easter celebrations at St. Peter's, however, this year it was skipped because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

During Mass, Pope Francis did not offer a homily, but sat in silence after the reading of the day's Gospel reading from John.

In his *Urbi et Orbi* address, Pope Francis urged Christians everywhere to turn to Jesus in suffering, “that he may heal the wounds of an afflicted humanity.”

He offered prayers for all those directly affected by the coronavirus, above all the deceased and family members who could not say goodbye.

“May the Lord of life welcome the departed into his kingdom and grant comfort and hope to those still suffering, especially the elderly and those who are alone,” he said, and prayed that God would console the vulnerable, especially those living in nursing homes, barracks and prisons.

“For many, this is an Easter of solitude lived amid the sorrow and hardship that the pandemic is causing, from physical suffering to economic difficulties,” he said, and asked God to grant strength and hope to the doctors and nurses who are exhausted and risk their health to serve the sick amid the pandemic. He also prayed for law enforcement and military personnel.

Noting how the coronavirus has changed the lives of millions in a few weeks’ time, sparking fear among many about unemployment and the ability to provide for their families, the pope urged political leaders to “work actively for the common good, to provide the means and resources needed to enable everyone to lead a dignified life and, when circumstances allow, to assist them in resuming their normal daily activities.”

With the whole world impacted by the virus, Pope Francis urged both people and nations not to fall into indifference, but to be attentive to the needs of others, especially “those living on the peripheries,” such as homeless, migrants and refugees.

“May these, the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters living in the cities and peripheries of every part of the world, not be abandoned. Let us ensure that they do not lack basic necessities,” including access to medicine and healthcare, he said.

Francis also called for the relaxing of international sanctions due to the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus, saying the sanctions “make it difficult for countries on which they have been imposed to provide adequate support to their citizens.”

He also urged the reduction or forgiveness of the debts owed by poor nations, so that they will be in a better position to “meet the greatest needs of the moment.”

“This is not a time for self-centeredness, because the challenge we are facing is shared by all, without distinguishing between persons,” he said, pointing to the wave of solidarity that swept through Europe following the Second World War.

Noting that the European Union now finds itself in the midst of a massive crisis, he said it is more urgent than ever that “these rivalries do not regain force, but that all recognize themselves as part of a single family and support one another.”

In present circumstances, the only alternative to solidarity “is the selfishness of particular interests and the temptation of a return to the past, at the risk of severely damaging the peaceful coexistence and development of future generations,” he said.

He called for an end to division, asking that God give all those who have a hand in global conflicts the courage to call for an immediate ceasefire throughout the world.

“This is not a time for continuing to manufacture and deal in arms, spending vast amounts of money that ought to be used to care for others and save lives,” he said, voicing hope that the pandemic might finally end the ongoing war in Syria and conflicts throughout the Middle East, Africa and Ukraine. Francis also offered prayers for those suffering a humanitarian crisis in Africa, Greece, Turkey and Venezuela, asking that child migrants and refugees would especially be protected.

“Dear brothers and sisters, indifference, self-centeredness, division and forgetfulness are not words we want to hear at this time. We want to ban these words forever!” he said, adding that these things will prevail as long as Jesus is not welcomed into peoples’ hearts and lives.

He closed praying that Christ, “who has already defeated death and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, dispel the darkness of our suffering humanity and lead us into the light of his glorious day, a day that knows no end.”