



An Ark to save us

THE PRAYER INTENTIONS OF THE HOLY FATHER FOR 2022

An interview with Frédéric Fornos SJ, International director - L'Osservatore Romano - 6 February 2021

**Pope's Worldwide
Prayer Network**



Prayer embraces all the needs of humankind and entrusts them to God. In this historical 'Noah moment', as Francis has described it, the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network is in the front line to sustain daily efforts towards a better world.

Which aspects are at centre stage in the finalising of the intentions for 2022?

Preparing is a time for listening and listening begins with what surrounds us. The news of these times we live in is this pandemic which concerns all of us, no matter what our social situation is or which country we live in: affecting the world everywhere, from the Far East to the Americas and across all of Asia, Europe and Africa. More than ever before, as Pope Francis indicates in *Laudato si'*, we are becoming aware that "everything is connected". So yes, this shared experience has certainly played a role in the preparatory work which has taken place.

As you know we receive suggestions from all the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network teams as well as various dicasteries, congregations, and other offices within the Holy See. We then propose the issues received to the Holy Father: these are challenges shared by different countries or those perceived to be the most important for the mission of the Church in the year 2022. Once he has received all the proposals, Francis sets aside a time for prayer and discernment, before entrusting us with his intentions for the Church. Whether they are intentions "for evangelisation" or "universal" intentions is of limited importance, since all the challenges facing humanity regard the mission of the Church and therefore the evangelisation of the world today. What counts for the people is to pray, in communion with so many other brothers and sisters worldwide, for the prayer intentions of the universal Church, a shared experience of prayer which makes it possible for us to detach from the globalisation of indifference and be part of a mission of compassion for the world.

Will we find references to the Covid-19 pandemic?

As Pope Francis says, "the Covid-19 pandemic is our 'Noah moment', provided that we find the Ark of the bonds that unite us, charity and a shared sense of belonging" (let us dream again as Pope Francis said to Austen Ivereigh). I think therefore that these prayer intentions must be identified in this context of crisis. A crisis, as the Holy Father stated in his catechesis entitled *Healing the world*, is an opportunity for constructing something different, to "help the human family to heal this world which is suffering serious illnesses".

All this, as I was saying, is present too in the intentions for 2022, hoping of course that – between now and then – humankind will have hopefully made the vaccine available for everyone. The Pope invites us therefore to pray for the health workers assisting those who are ill

and the elderly, above all in the poorest countries, so that they will be supported by governments and local communities. We do not know what we will be living through in 2022, but it is clear that good health will remain an essential resource and we will have to take care nonetheless of the most vulnerable, the sick and the elderly.

Also linked to this is the invitation of Pope Francis to pray and give thanks for the mission of so many religious and consecrated women: often in the front line, beside the poorest and most fragile. Their mission is now even more precious in a society undergoing a crisis. How many times have they been undervalued as women and as consecrated people, and at times their service and commitment transformed into servitude? The Holy Father holds them close in his heart and in his prayers.

Then of course there is a huge portion of humanity who, in different latitudes, have experienced this difficult moment also at a critical economic level. Francis keeps a special place in his heart, for example, for small and medium businesses hard hit by the economic and social crisis, and invites us to pray for them, as well as for the voluntary organisations which now – even more than ever in a moment like this, with governments facing unforeseeable emergencies – do everything in their power to help those in need and serve the common good

However there are also other pandemics, more subtle ones. There is the pandemic of indifference, which often concerns children, “living on the streets, victims of war and orphans”. The Pope prays for them, so that they may have access to education and can rediscover the love and affection of a family.

Have certain priorities been included?

There are three prayer intentions which emerge clearly, like a triptych, each linked to the World Meeting of Families, which will take place in Rome in June 2022: for the faith of young people, for families and for the elderly. It is as if during this time of crisis, the Pope - who in 2021 gave us fraternity as our compass – is inviting us to an alliance between generations, above all between the youngest and the eldest, a relationship often neglected, so that this bridge may constitute a hope for the future

In an article in ‘La Civiltà Cattolica’ (no. 4093), Jesuit Father Jean-Pierre Sonnet reminds us that “from the very beginning of his Pontificate, Pope Francis has appeared as a voice calling for a new understanding among generations, in particular between grandparents and grandchildren”. This is true and it is not a coincidence that Pope Francis likes often to remind us of the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams” (Joel 3, 1; cf At 2, 17). In particular, the Pope’s prayer intention for July 2022 will be dedicated to the elderly: the same month chosen for the celebration of the World Day for grandparents and the Elderly, as announced recently by the Holy Father.

Which are the major challenges we will need to respond to in the near future?

In order to overcome this global crisis, Pope Francis has provided us with a compass in the encyclical Fratelli Tutti: human brotherhood, a path of compassion for the world. Religions can provide precious support for fraternity. This path is not an easy one, but – as Francis says – “either we are brothers and sisters, or everything will fall apart. Fraternity is the new frontier for humanity on which we need to build; it is the challenge of our century”. For this reason, it is

important to recognise what injures fraternity, in order to heal the wounds. Let us think, for example, of the intention for January 2022: “May all those suffering religious discrimination and persecution find in the societies wherein they live recognition of their own rights and the dignity which springs from being brothers and sisters”.

In a time of crisis such as this there is always the risk of wanting to save ourselves alone, without anyone else, considering others to be dangerous, allowing fear to influence our choices, or refusing to enter into dialogue or seek a common path. In the times we are living in “it is important to dream together [...] as a single human family [...] as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all!” (Fratelli tutti 8).

Society today presents us however with other challenges, which deserve a Christian response. Some are challenges which are increasingly new, such as those posed by bioethics: Francis invites us to promote “the defence of life with prayer and social action”. Others are centuries old, but still present in our modern world: such as the death penalty, still today unfortunately practised in many countries. Francis invites us to pray for the abolition of the death penalty, in line additionally with the affirmations of Fratelli Tutti and specified in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “the Church is committed with determination to working for the abolition of the death penalty worldwide”. Therefore, in 2022 a whole month of prayer will be consecrated to this challenge.

With all these challenges facing humanity, in this ‘Noah Moment’ we are living through, it is necessary more than ever to carry out the reform of the Church, which can be defined as a process of spiritual conversion. [This is why we are beginning a Synodal Way that will lead us to the next Synod of Bishops in October 2023. Several prayer intentions accompany us on this journey]¹, in particular, in October 2022 the Pope invites us to pray for a Church open to everyone: “we pray that the Church, faithful to the Gospel and courageous in announcing, be a place of solidarity, fraternity and true welcome, and continue to foster an atmosphere of sinodality”.

Is the Worldwide Prayer Network still undergoing renewal and planning new projects?

The process of institutional renewal, although still ongoing in many parts of the world, is today almost complete. Renewal is a long process of conversion and does not derive from us, or from our efforts, nor even from the communication technology and creative projects we have undoubtedly commenced (the Pope videos, Click to pray, the Way of the Heart, etc.) and which we continue to promote with passion. Nor does it derive from the new forms of communication or the new structural networks we have organised to incarnate this mission in the world today. This renewal originates solely in the Lord. What does originate from us is the setting up of processes capable of generating a new dynamic to help enter into a new intelligence for our mission of compassion for the world, that is our union in the Heart of Christ, becoming ever day more docile to His Spirit. This is the most difficult thing, it is a grace we must ask for and be disposed to receive, since often we have difficulty in opening ourselves to the newness of God, yet He continues to operate, today just as yesterday.

¹ Updated, 1 October 2021

Interview by Nicola Gori (original Italian)

<https://www.osservatoreromano.va/it/news/2021-02/quo-030/un-arca-per-salvarci.html>