

Pope Francis'
Pilgrimage of Peace to South Sudan
Juba, 3 – 5 February 2023

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1/ Meeting with Authorities, Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps

*Garden of the Presidential Palace (Juba)
Friday, 3rd February 2023*

*Mr President,
Honourable Vice-Presidents,
Honourable Members of Government and the Diplomatic
Corps,
Eminent Religious and Civil Authorities,
Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society and the
World of Culture,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Thank you, Mr President, for your kind words. I am pleased to be in this country, which has a special place in my heart. I am grateful to you, Mr President, for your welcome, and I offer a cordial greeting to each of you, and through you, to all the men and women living in this young and beloved country. I have come here as a pilgrim of reconciliation, in the hope of accompanying you on your journey of peace. It is a circuitous journey, yet one that can no longer be postponed. Nor am I here by myself, for in peace as in life, we all journey together. So I have come with two brothers, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, whom I thank for all that they will say to us. Together, stretching out our hands, we present ourselves to you and to this people in the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

We undertook this *ecumenical pilgrimage of peace* after hearing the plea of an entire people that, with great dignity, weeps for the violence it endures, its persistent lack of security, its poverty and the natural disasters that it has experienced. Years of war and conflict seem never to end and recently, even yesterday, there have been bitter clashes. At the same time, the process of reconciliation seems stagnant and the promise of peace unfulfilled. May this protracted suffering not be in vain; may the patience and the sacrifices of the South Sudanese, this young, humble and courageous people, challenge everyone and, like the seeds sown in the soil that give life to plants, allow peace to blossom and bear fruit. Brothers and sisters, it is time for peace!

Fruits and vegetation abound here, thanks to the great river that passes through the country. What the ancient historian Herodotus said of Egypt, namely, that it can be called a “gift of the Nile” also applies to South Sudan. Truly, as you are wont to say, this is a “land of great abundance”. I would like to take up the image of this great river that crosses the country, a young nation but one with an ancient history. Over the centuries, explorers have ventured into this region to go up the White Nile in search of the sources of the longest river in the world. It is precisely from the search for the sources of our life together that I would like to begin my journey with you. This land, which abounds in so many riches, in its soil but above all in the hearts and minds of its people, nowadays needs to be watered anew by fresh and life-giving springs.

You, distinguished leaders, are these springs: the springs that water the life of the community, the fathers and mothers of this young country. You are called to renew the life of society as pure sources of prosperity and peace, so greatly needed for the sons and daughters of South Sudan. They need fathers, not overlords; they need steady steps towards development, not constant collapses. May the time that followed the birth of the country, its painful childhood, lead to a peaceful maturity: it is time. Dear authorities, those “sons and daughters”, and history itself, will remember you if you work for the benefit of this people that you have been called to serve. Future generations will either venerate your names or cancel their memory, based on what you now do. For just as the Nile leaves its sources to begin its course, so the course of history will leave behind the enemies of peace and bring renown to those who are true peacemakers. Indeed, as Scripture tell us, “there is posterity for the man of peace” (cf. *Ps 37:37*).

Violence, on the other hand, turns back the course of history. Herodotus himself spoke of the intergenerational disruption brought on by war, when children no longer bury their parents, but parents bury their children (cf. *Histories*, I, 87). In order that this land may not turn into a cemetery, but become once more a luxuriant garden, I beg you, with all my heart, to accept four simple words: not my words, but those of Christ. He himself spoke them in a garden, in Gethsemane, when, to a disciple of his who had drawn a sword, he cried: “No more of this!” (*Lk 22:51*). Dear

President and Vice-Presidents, in the name of God, of the God to whom we prayed together in Rome, of the God who is gentle and humble in heart (cf. *Mt 11:29*), the God in whom so many people of this beloved country believe, now is the time to say “*No more of this*”, without “ifs” or “buts”. No more bloodshed, no more conflicts, no more violence and mutual recriminations about who is responsible for it, no more leaving your people athirst for peace. No more destruction: it is time to build! Leave the time of war behind and let a time of peace dawn! And in this regard, Mr. President, I remember that evening conversation we had years ago in Uganda: your desire for peace was there... Let us move forward on this!

Let us think again of the sources of the river, to those waters that symbolize life. The sources of this country, and the course undertaken by the South Sudanese people on 9 July 2011, call to mind another word: *Republic*. Yet what does it mean to be a Republic, a *res publica*? It means seeing yourselves as truly “public”, “of the people”; it is to declare that the state belongs to everyone; and consequently those entrusted with greater responsibilities, presiding over and governing it, have the duty to place themselves at the service of the common good. That is the purpose of power: to serve the community. Yet there is always a temptation to use power for our own advantage. So it is not enough simply to be called a Republic; it is necessary to be one, starting with the primary goods. The abundant resources with which God has blessed this land should not be restricted to a few, but

recognized as the legacy of all, and plans for economic recovery should coincide with proposals for an equitable distribution of wealth.

The growth of a sound democracy is essential to the life of a Republic. It preserves the healthy distinction of powers in such a way that, for example, those who administer justice can do so without interference from those who legislate or govern. In addition, democracy presupposes respect for human rights, upheld by law and the application of law, particularly the right to the freedom of self-expression. It should be kept in mind that *there is no peace without justice* (cf. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2002), but also that *there is no justice without freedom*. Every citizen, therefore, should be enabled to make the most of the unique and unrepeatable gift of his or her life, and be provided with suitable means of doing so. In the words of Pope John XXIII: “Every human being has the right to life, to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life” (*Pacem in Terris*, 11).

The Nile, leaving its sources, and passing through some uneven terrain that creates waterfalls and rapids, enters the South Sudanese plain and, near Juba, becomes navigable, before entering more boggy areas. In a similar way, I trust that the Republic’s path to peace will not proceed unevenly, but, starting from this capital, will take a course that can be navigated and not be bogged down by inertia. Dear friends, it is time to move from words to deeds. It is time to turn the page:

it is the time for *commitment* to an urgent and much-needed transformation. The process of peace and reconciliation requires a new start. May an understanding be reached and progress be made in moving forward with the Peace Accord and the Road Map! In a world scarred by divisions and conflict, this country is hosting an ecumenical pilgrimage of peace, which is something rare; it represents *a change of direction*, an opportunity for South Sudan to resume sailing in calm waters, taking up dialogue, without duplicity and opportunism. May it be for everyone an occasion *to revive hope*, not only for the government, but for everyone. Let each citizen understand that the time has come to stop being carried along by the tainted waters of hatred, tribalism, regionalism and ethnic differences. Brothers and sisters, it is time to sail together towards the future! Together. We must not forget this word: together.

The course of the great river can also suggest a way to move forward. Along its way, the Nile joins another river at Lake No, forming the so-called White Nile. It's transparently clear waters, then, arise from an *encounter*. Dear brothers and sisters, this is the path to take: to respect one another, to get to know one another and to engage in dialogue. Behind every form of violence, there is anger and resentment, and behind every form of anger and resentment, there is the unhealed memory of wounds, humiliations and wrongs. It follows that the only way to break free of these is through encounter, the culture of encounter: by accepting others as our brothers and sisters and

making room for them, even if it means taking a step backwards. This attitude, which is essential for any peace process, is also indispensable for the cohesive development of society. In the passage from the barbarity of confrontation to a culture of vital encounter, *young people* have a decisive role to play. Consequently, they should be provided with open spaces of encounter for meeting and discussion. May they fearlessly take hold of the future which is theirs! Then too, women, mothers who know how life is generated and safeguarded, need to be increasingly involved in political life and decision-making processes. Women need to be respected, for anyone who commits an act of violence towards a woman commits it towards God, who took flesh from a woman.

Christ, the Word incarnate, taught us that the more we make ourselves little, by making room for others and by welcoming every neighbour as a brother or sister, the greater we become in the eyes of the Lord. The young history of this country, torn by ethnic clashes, needs to discover *the mystique of encounter*, the grace of the whole. There is a need to look beyond groups and differences in order to journey as one people, which, as in the Nile, is enriched by the contribution of its various tributaries. It was precisely by the river that, more than a century ago, the first missionaries came to these shores, followed over time by many humanitarian workers. I want to thank all of them for the valuable work they do. At the same time, I think of those missionaries who, sad to say, encounter death while sowing life. Let us not forget them and let

us not forget to ensure for them and for humanitarian workers the security and support they need for their charitable works, so that the river of goodness may continue to flow.

A great river, however, can at times overflow and cause disasters. Tragically, this has been the experience of the many victims of floods in this country. I express my closeness to them, and appeal that they not lack the help they need. Natural disasters tell the tale of a nature that is battered and wounded, and from being a source of life, can turn into a deadly menace. We need the foresight to care for creation, for the sake of future generations. I think, in particular, of the need to combat the deforestation caused by profiteering.

To prevent a river from flooding, its bed has to be kept clean. Leaving behind the metaphor, the cleaning needed by the flow of life in society is represented by *the battle against corruption*. The inequitable distribution of funds, secret schemes to get rich, patronage deals, lack of transparency: all these pollute the riverbed of human society; they divert resources from the very things most needed. Before all else, there is a need to combat poverty, which serves as the fertile soil in which hatred, divisions and violence take root. The pressing need of any civilized country is to care for its citizens, especially the most vulnerable and the disadvantaged. Here I think especially of the millions of displaced persons who live here: how many people have had to flee their homes, and now find themselves

consigned to the margins of life as a result of conflicts and forced displacement!

For its life-giving waters not to turn into a deadly source of danger, it is essential that the course of a river be controlled by suitable embankments. The same is true for human coexistence. Above all, there is a need to control the flow of weapons that, despite bans, continue to arrive in many countries in the area, including South Sudan: many things are needed here, but surely not more instruments of death! Other forms of embankment are essential in order to control the healthy flow of social life. Here, I would mention the development of suitable healthcare policies, the need for vital infrastructures and especially the primary goal of promoting literacy and education, the only way that the children of this land will be able to take their future into their own hands. Like all the children of this continent and of the world, they have the right to grow up holding in their hands notebooks and toys, not weapons and tools for labour.

Finally, the White Nile leaves South Sudan, passes through other countries, joins the Blue Nile and then flows into the sea. Rivers know no borders; they connect different territories. In a similar way, in order to achieve a suitable development, it is essential, now more than ever, to foster positive relationships with other countries, starting with those in the area. Here, I think too of the precious contribution made by the international community to this country, and I express my gratitude for the efforts made to promote

reconciliation and development. I am convinced that, for those contributions to be fruitful, a genuine understanding of social processes and problems is essential. It is not enough to analyze and report on them from afar; there is a need to be directly involved, with patience and determination and, more generally, to resist the temptation to impose pre-established models alien to local realities. As Saint John Paul II said thirty years ago in Sudan: “African solutions must be found to African problems” (Address at the Welcome Ceremony, 10 February 1993).

Mr President, distinguished authorities, in tracing the course of the Nile, I wanted to venture along the path of this country, as young as it is beloved. I realize that some of what I have had to say may appear blunt and direct, but please, know that this arises from the affection and concern with which I follow the life of your country, together with my brothers with whom I have come here as a pilgrim of peace. We wish to offer you our heartfelt prayers and our support, so that South Sudan can experience reconciliation and a change of direction. May its vital course no longer be overwhelmed by the flood of violence, mired in the swamps of corruption and blocked by the inundation of poverty. May the Lord of heaven, who loves this land, grant it a new season of peace and prosperity. God bless the Republic of South Sudan! Thank you.

2/ Meeting with Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Persons and Seminarians

*Cathedral of Saint Therese (Juba)
Saturday, 4 February 2023*

*Dear brother Bishops, priests and deacons,
Dear consecrated brothers and sisters,
Dear seminarians, novices and aspirants, good morning to all
of you!*

I have been looking forward to meeting you, and I want to thank the Lord for this occasion. I am grateful to Bishop Tombe Trille for his words of greeting and to all of you for your presence today and also for your greeting; some of you travelled for days to be here today! Several of our previous experiences have a special place in my heart: the celebration in Saint Peter's in 2017, when we prayed together for the gift of peace, and the spiritual retreat in 2019 with the political leaders, who were asked to embrace, through prayer, the firm resolve to pursue reconciliation and fraternity in this country. Indeed, all of us need to embrace Jesus, our peace and our hope.

In my address yesterday, I drew upon the image of the waters of the Nile, which flows through your country, as if it were its backbone. In the Bible, water is often associated with God's activity in creation, his compassion in quenching our thirst when we wander through the desert, and his mercy in cleansing us when we are mired in sin. In baptism, he sanctified us

“through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (*Titus* 3:5). From the same biblical perspective, I would like to take another look at the waters of the Nile. Merged with those waters are the tears of a people immersed in suffering and pain, and tormented by violence, who can pray like the psalmist, “By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept” (*Ps* 137:1). Indeed, the waters of that great river collect the sighs and sufferings of your communities, they collect the pain of so many shattered lives, they collect the tragedy of a people in flight, the sorrow and fear in the hearts and eyes of so many women and children. We can see this fear in the eyes of children. At the same time, though, the waters of the Nile remind us of the story of Moses and thus they also speak of liberation and salvation. From those waters, Moses was saved and, by leading his own people through the Red Sea, he became for them a means of liberation, an icon of the saving help of God who sees the affliction of his children, hears their cry and comes down to set them free (cf. *Ex* 3:7). Remembering the story of Moses, who led God’s people through the desert, let us ask ourselves what it means for us to be ministers of God in a land scarred by war, hatred, violence, and poverty. How can we exercise our ministry in this land, along the banks of a river bathed in so much innocent blood, among the tear-stained faces of the people entrusted to us? This is the question. And when I speak of ministry, I do so in the broad sense: priestly and diaconal ministry and also catechetical ministry, the ministry of teaching,

which so many consecrated men and women, as well as the lay faithful, carry out.

To try to answer this, I would like to reflect on two aspects of Moses' character: his *meekness* and his *intercession*. I think these two aspects concern our lives here.

The first thing that strikes us about the story of Moses is his meekness, his docile response to God's initiative. We must not think, though, that it was always this way: at first, he attempted to fight injustice and oppression on his own. Saved by Pharaoh's daughter in the waters of the Nile, he then discovered his identity and was moved by the suffering and humiliation of his brothers, so much so that one day he decided to take justice into his own hands: he killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew. As a result, he had to flee to the desert, where he remained for many years. There he experienced a kind of interior desert. He had thought he could confront injustice on his own and now he found himself a fugitive, alone and in hiding, experiencing a bitter sense of failure. I wonder: What was Moses' mistake? He had put himself at the centre, and relied on his strength alone. Yet in this way, he remained trapped in the worst of our human ways of doing things: he had responded to violence with violence.

At times, something similar can happen in our own lives as priests, deacons, religious, seminarians, consecrated men and women, all of us: deep down, we can think that we are at the centre of everything, that

we can rely, if not in theory at least in practice, almost exclusively on our own talents and abilities. Or, as a Church, we think we can find an answer to people's suffering and needs through human resources, like money, cleverness or power. Instead, everything we accomplish comes from God: he is the Lord, and we are called to be docile instruments in his hands. Moses learned this when, one day, God appeared to him "in a flame of fire out of a bush" (*Ex 3:2*). Moses found himself drawn to this sight; he was open to being amazed and so, in meekness, he approached that strange blazing fire. He thought: "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up" (v. 3). This is the kind of meekness that we need in our ministry: a readiness to approach God in wonder and humility. Sisters and brothers, do not lose the wonder of the encounter with God! Do not lose the wonder of contact with the word of God. Moses let himself be drawn to God and guided by him. The primacy is not ours, the primacy is God's: entrusting ourselves to his word before we start using our own words, meekly accepting his initiative before we get caught up in our personal and ecclesial projects.

By allowing ourselves, in meekness, to be shaped by the Lord, we experience renewal in our ministry. In the presence of the Good Shepherd, we realize that we are not tribal chieftains, but compassionate and merciful shepherds; not overlords, but servants who stoop to wash the feet of our brothers and sisters; we are not a worldly agency that administers earthly goods, but the community of God's children. Dear sisters and

brothers, let us do, then, what Moses did in God's presence. Let us remove our sandals with humble awe (cf. v. 5) and divest ourselves of our human presumption. Let us allow ourselves to be drawn to the Lord and spend time with him in prayer. Let us daily approach the mystery of God, so that he can astonish us and burn away the dead wood of our pride and our immoderate ambitions, and make us *humble travelling companions of all those entrusted to our care*.

Purified and enlightened by the divine fire, Moses became a means of salvation for his suffering brothers and sisters. His meekness before God made him capable of interceding for them. This is the second aspect of his character that I would like to discuss today: Moses was an intercessor. He experienced a God of compassion, who hears the cry of his people and comes down to deliver them. This phrase is beautiful: he *comes down*. God comes down to deliver them. In his "condescension", God comes down among us, even taking on our flesh in Jesus, experiencing our death and our most hellish moments. He constantly *comes down in order to raise us up*. *Those who experience him are led to imitate him*. Like Moses, who "came down" to be in the midst of his people a number of times during the sojourn in the desert. Indeed, at the most important and trying moments, he would ascend the mountain of God's presence to *intercede for the people*, that is, *to stand in their place* in order to bring them closer to God, and then come down. Brothers and sisters, interceding "does not mean simply 'praying for someone', as we so often think. Etymologically it means

‘to step into the middle’, to be willing to walk into the middle of a situation” (C.M. MARTINI, *Un grido di intercessione*, Milan, 29 January 1991). Sometimes we do not obtain much, but we need to offer a cry of intercession. To intercede is thus to come down and place ourselves in the midst of our people, to act as a bridge that connects them to God.

It is precisely this art of “stepping into the middle” of our brothers and sisters that the Church’s pastors need to cultivate; this must be their specialty: the ability to step into the middle of their sufferings and tears, into the middle of their hunger for God and their thirst for love. Our first duty is not to be a Church that is perfectly organized – any company can do this – but a Church that, in the name of Christ, stands in the midst of people’s troubled lives, a Church that is willing to dirty its hands for people. We must never exercise our ministry by chasing after religious or social prestige – the ugliness of careerism – but rather by walking in the midst of and alongside our people, learning to listen and to dialogue, cooperating as ministers with one another and with the laity. Let me repeat this important word: *together*. Let us never forget it: *together*. Bishops and priests, priests and deacons, pastors and seminarians, ordained ministers and religious – always showing respect for the marvelous specificity of religious life. Let us make every effort to banish the temptation to individualism, to partisan interests. How sad it is when the Church’s pastors are incapable of communion, when they fail to cooperate, and even ignore one another! Let us cultivate mutual

respect, closeness and practical cooperation. If we fail to do this ourselves, how can we preach it to others?

Let us now go back to Moses, and reflect on the art of intercession, let us look at his hands. Scripture offers us three images in this regard: Moses with staff in hand, Moses with outstretched hands, Moses with his hands raised to heaven.

The first image, Moses with staff in hand, tells us that he intercedes *with prophecy*. With that staff, he works wonders, signs of God's presence and power; he speaks in God's name, forcefully denouncing the oppression that the people are suffering, and demanding Pharaoh to let them depart. Brothers and sisters, we too are called to intercede for our people, to raise our voices against the injustice and the abuses of power that oppress and use violence to suit their own ends amid the cloud of conflicts. If we want to be pastors who intercede, we cannot remain neutral before the pain caused by acts of injustice and violence. To violate the fundamental rights of any woman or man is an offence against Christ himself. I was happy to hear in Father Luka's testimony that the Church tirelessly carries out a ministry that is both prophetic and pastoral. Thank you! Thank you because, if there is one temptation against which we must guard, it is that of leaving things as they are and not getting involved in situations for fear of losing privileges and benefits.

The second image is that of Moses with outstretched hands. Scripture tells us that he "stretched out his hand over the sea" (*Ex 14:21*). His extended hands are the

sign that God is about to show his power. Later, Moses will hold the tablets of the Law in his hands (cf. *Ex 34:29*) and show them to the people; his upraised hands demonstrate *the closeness of God who is ever active* in accompanying his people. Of itself, prophecy does not suffice for deliverance from evil: it is necessary to extend our arms to our brothers and sisters, to support them on their journey; to caress God's flock. We can imagine Moses pointing the way and taking people by the hand to encourage them to persevere. For forty years, in his old age, he remained at their side: that is what closeness means. It was no easy task: often he had to lift the spirits of a people who were discouraged and weary, hungry and thirsty, and sometimes even wayward and prone to grumbling and lethargy. In doing so, Moses also had to struggle with himself, for at times, he too experienced moments of darkness and desolation, as when he said to the Lord: "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favour in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? ... I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me" (*Num 11:11, 14*). Look at how Moses prayed: he was tired. Yet, he did not step back: ever close to God, he did not turn his back on his people. This is also our job: to stretch out our hands, to rouse our brothers and sisters, to remind them that God is faithful to his promises, to urge them on. Our hands were "anointed with Spirit" not only for the sacred rites, but also to encourage, help and accompany people to leave behind

whatever paralyzes them, keeps them closed in on themselves, and makes them fearful.

Finally – the third image – Moses with his hands raised to heaven. When the people fell into sin and made a golden calf for themselves, Moses went up the mountain once again – think of what great patience he must have had! – and said a *prayer*, which shows him wrestling with God, begging him not to abandon Israel. He went so far as to say: “This people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will only forgive their sin – but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written” (*Ex 32:31-32*). Moses stood with the people to the very end, raising his hands on their behalf. He did not think of saving himself alone; he did not sell out the people for his own interests! He interceded, he wrestled with God; he kept his arms raised in prayer while his brethren battled in the valley below (cf. *Ex 17:8-16*). Bringing the struggles of the people before God in prayer, obtaining forgiveness for them, administering reconciliation as channels of God’s mercy: this is our task as intercessors.

Beloved, these prophetic hands, outstretched and raised, demand great effort, which is not easy. To be prophets, companions and intercessors, to show with our life the mystery of God’s closeness to his people, can cost us our lives. Many priests and religious – as Sister Regina told us of her own sisters – have been victims of violence and attacks in which they lost their lives. In a very real way, they offered their lives for the

sake of the Gospel. Their closeness to their brothers and sisters is a marvellous testimony that they bequeath to us, a legacy that invites us to carry forward their mission. Let us think of Saint Daniele Comboni, who with his missionary brothers carried out a great work of evangelization in this land. He used to say that a missionary must be ready to do anything for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. We need courageous and generous souls ready to suffer and die for Africa.

I would like to thank you, then, for everything that you do amid so many trials and tribulations. Thank you, on behalf of the entire Church, for your dedication, your courage, your sacrifices and your patience. Thank you! Dear brothers and sisters, I pray that you will always be generous pastors and witnesses, armed only with prayer and love; pastors and witnesses allowing yourselves, in meekness, to be constantly surprised by God's grace; and that you may become a means of salvation for others, pastors and prophets of closeness who accompany the people, intercessors with uplifted arms. May the Blessed Virgin Mary protect you. At this moment, let us recall in silence those brothers and sisters of ours who have given their lives in pastoral ministry here, and let us thank the Lord because he has been close. Let us thank the Lord for the closeness of their "martyrdom". Let us pray in silence.

Thank you for your witness. And, if you have a little time, please pray for me. Thank you.

3/ Meeting with Internally Displaced Persons

*“Freedom Hall” (Juba)
Saturday, 4 February 2023*

Dear brothers and sisters, good afternoon!

Thank you for your prayers, your testimonies and your singing! I have been thinking of you for a long time, with a growing desire to have this meeting, to see you face to face, to shake your hands and to embrace you. Now at last I am here, together with my brothers on this pilgrimage of peace, to express to you all my closeness, all my affection. I am with here you, and I suffer for you and with you.

Joseph, you asked a crucial question: “Why do we have to suffer in a camp for displaced persons?” Why...? Why do so many children and young people like you end up here, rather than studying in school or playing in a nice open place? You answered your own question, when you said that it is “because of the ongoing conflicts in the country”. Due to the devastation caused by human violence, as well as that caused by the floods, millions of our brothers and sisters like you, including many mothers with children, have had to leave their lands and abandon their villages and their homes. Sadly, in this war-torn country, being a displaced person or a refugee has become a common and collective experience.

That is why I want to renew my forceful and heartfelt appeal to end all conflict and to resume the peace process in a serious way, so that violence can end and people can return to living in dignity. Only with peace, stability and justice can there be development and social reintegration. *There is no room for further delay*: great numbers of children born in recent years have known only the reality of camps for displaced persons. They have no memory of what it means to have a home; they are losing their connection with their native land, their roots and their traditions.

The future cannot lie in refugee camps. As you said, Johnson, there is a need for all children like yourself to have the opportunity to go to school – and to have a field to play football! There is a need for you to grow as an open society, for different groups to mingle and to form a single people by embracing the challenges of integration, even learning the languages spoken throughout the country and not just those in your particular ethnic group. This means embracing the marvellous risk of knowing and accepting those who are different, discovering the beauty of a reconciled fraternity and experiencing the thrilling challenge of freely shaping your own future along with that of the entire community. It is absolutely essential to avoid ostracizing groups and ghettoizing human beings. To meet all these challenges, however, *there is a need for peace*. And for the help of many, indeed of everyone.

I would like to thank Deputy Special Representative Sara Beysolow Nyanti for telling us that today

represents an opportunity for people to realize what has been going on for years in this country. A country with the greatest enduring refugee crisis on the continent: at least four million children of this land are displaced; food insecurity and malnutrition affect two-thirds of the population, and forecasts predict a humanitarian tragedy that could further worsen in the course of this year. So I would like to thank you, above all because you and many others did not sit around analysing the situation, but went straight to work. You, Madam, have travelled throughout the country; you have looked into the eyes of mothers and witnessed the pain they feel for the situation of their children. I was moved when you said that, despite all that they are suffering, smiles and hope have never faded from their faces.

I also agree with what you said about them: mothers, women are *the key to transforming the country*. If they receive the proper opportunities, through their industriousness and their natural gift of protecting life, they will have the ability to change the face of South Sudan, to give it a peaceful and cohesive development! I ask you, I ask all the people of these lands, to ensure that women are protected, respected, valued and honoured. Please, protect, respect, appreciate and honour every woman, every girl, young woman, mother and grandmother. Otherwise, there will be no future.

Brothers and sisters, once more I look out at you. I see your eyes, weary but bright, eyes that have not lost

hope. I see your mouths, which have not lost the strength to pray and to sing. I see you with empty hands but hearts full of faith. You bear the burden of a painful past, yet you never stop dreaming of a better future. In our meeting today, we would like to give wings to your hope. We hope and believe that now, even in the camps for displaced persons, where sadly you are forced to live due to the situation in your country, a new seed can sprout, as from the dry and barren soil: a new seed that will bear rich fruit.

That is what I want to tell you: that you are the seed of a new South Sudan, a seed for the fertile and lush growth of this country. You, from all your different ethnic groups, you who have suffered and are still suffering, you who do not want to respond to evil with more evil. You, who choose fraternity and forgiveness, are even now cultivating a better tomorrow. A tomorrow that is being born today, wherever you find yourselves, from your ability to cooperate, to weave webs of communion and paths of reconciliation with those who, while different from you in terms of ethnicity and origin, are your neighbours. Brothers and sisters, be seeds of hope, which make it possible for us already to glimpse the tree that one day, hopefully in the near future, will bear fruit. Yes, you will be the trees that absorb the pollution of years of violence and restore the oxygen of fraternity. True, right now you are “planted” where you don’t want to be, but precisely from this situation of hardship and uncertainty, you can reach out to those around you and experience that you all are rooted in the one human family. From here,

you must make a new start, to realize that you are all brothers and sisters, children on earth of God in heaven, the Father of us all.

Dear friends, to speak of roots reminds us that every plant springs up from a seed. It is a beautiful thing that people here care deeply about their roots. I remember reading that in these lands “the roots must never be forgotten”, because “the ancestors remind us who we are and what our path should be... Without them we are lost, frightened and without a compass. There is no future without a past” (C. CARLASSARE, *La capanna di Padre Carlo. Comboniano tra i Nuer*, 2020, 65). In South Sudan, young people grow up benefitting from the stories of the elderly and, although the chapter of recent years has been one of violence, it is possible, and indeed necessary, to launch a new chapter, starting with yourselves. A new *chapter of encounter*, which does not forget past sufferings, but radiates the joyful light of fraternity; a chapter that does not focus only on reports of tragedy, but on the ardent desire for peace. May you, young people of different ethnicities, write the first pages of this new chapter! Although conflict, violence and hatred have replaced good memories on the first pages of the life of this Republic, you must be the ones to rewrite its history as a history of peace! I thank you for your strength and perseverance, and for all the good you do, which is so pleasing to God and enriches each day of your lives.

In addition, I would like to address a word of gratitude to all those who help you, often in conditions

of hardship, but also in emergency situations. I thank the ecclesial communities for their efforts, which deserve to be supported. I thank also the missionaries and the humanitarian and international organizations, in particular the United Nations, for the important work they do. To be sure, a country cannot survive on external means of support, especially if it possesses a territory so rich in resources! At the present time, however, those means of support are badly needed. I would also like to honour the many humanitarian workers who have lost their lives, and to plead for respect for those who offer help and for the structures that assist the population; they should not become targets of assaults and vandalism. Together with urgently needed aid, I believe that it is very important, in the future, to accompany the population on the path of development, for example by helping them to learn up-to-date practices in the areas of agriculture and livestock management, so as to facilitate a more independent growth. I plead with everyone from the heart: let us help South Sudan; let us not abandon its population. They have suffered and they continue to suffer so greatly!

In conclusion, I would like to mention the many South Sudanese refugees living outside the country and those who cannot return because their territories have been occupied. I am close to them and I trust that they can once again take an active role in shaping the future of their land and contribute to its development in a constructive and peaceful manner. Nyakuor Rebecca, you asked me for a special blessing upon the children

of South Sudan, precisely so that all of you might grow up together in peace. The three of us, as brothers, will give the blessing: together with my brother Justin and my brother Iain, we will give all of you the blessing. With it comes the blessing of so many of our Christian brothers and sisters in the world, who embrace and encourage you, knowing that you, your faith, your inner strength and your dreams of peace, radiate all the beauty of our shared humanity.

4/ Ecumenical Prayer

*“John Garang” Mausoleum (Juba)
Saturday, 4 February 2023*

*Mr President,
Distinguished Religious and Civil Authorities,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

From this beloved land, wracked by violence, many prayers have now been raised to heaven. Many different voices have united to form a single voice. Together, as God’s holy people, we have prayed for this people and its suffering. As Christians, prayer is the first and most important thing we are called to do in order to work for the good and to find the strength needed to persevere on our journey. *To pray, to work and to journey*: let us reflect on these three verbs.

First, *to pray*. The great commitment of Christian communities to human development, solidarity and peace would be fruitless without prayer. Indeed, we cannot promote peace without first invoking Jesus the “Prince of Peace” (*Is 9:5*). Whatever we do for others and share with them is above all a freely given gift that we, in our emptyhandedness, have received from him: it is grace, pure grace. We are Christians because we have been freely loved by Jesus Christ.

This morning, I spoke of the figure of Moses, and now, precisely in connection with prayer, I would like to recall an event that was decisive for him and for his people. It occurred when he had already begun to lead

the people to freedom. When they reached the shores of the Red Sea, Moses and all the Israelites found themselves at a dramatic impasse. Before them, they saw an impassable wall of water; behind them, the enemy force was closing in on them with chariots and horses. Does that not perhaps remind us of the early days of this country, caught between the waters of death, the disastrous floods that hit the country, and the brutal violence of war? Yet in that desperate situation, Moses told the people: "Fear not, stand firm, and you will see the salvation of the Lord" (*Ex 14:13*). I ask myself, where did Moses find this kind of certainty amid the constant fears and laments of his people? That strength came to him from listening to the Lord (cf. vv. 2-4), who had promised him that he was about to manifest his glory. Union with God, trust in him, cultivated by prayer: this was the secret of the strength that enabled Moses to lead the people from oppression to freedom.

The same holds true for us. Prayer gives us the strength to go forward, to overcome our fears, to glimpse, even in the darkness, the salvation that God is even now preparing. Moreover, prayer brings down God's salvation upon the people. The prayer of intercession that marked the life of Moses (cf. *Ex 32:11-14*) is the type of prayer that we, as shepherds of God's holy people, are especially called to practise. Prayer for the Lord of peace to intervene where men and women are powerless to bring about peace: a tenacious and constant prayer of intercession. Dear brothers and sisters, let us support one another in this effort. In the

diversity of our confessions, let us feel united among ourselves, as one family, responsible to pray for everyone. In our parishes, our churches, our places of praise and worship, let us pray constantly (cf. *Acts* 1:14) that South Sudan, like the people of God in the Scriptures, “may come to the promised land”. Let us pray that, in a spirit of serenity, equitable provisions will be made for the use of its rich and fertile land and that the country will be crowned with the promised peace that, sadly, has yet to come.

It is precisely for peace that we are called *to work*. Jesus wants us to be peacemakers (cf. *Mt* 5:9). He wants his Church to be not only a sign and instrument of intimate union with God but also of the unity of the entire human family (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1). Indeed, as Saint Paul tells us, Christ “is our peace” precisely because he restores unity. It is he who “made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (cf. *Eph* 2:14). That is what the peace of God is: not only a truce amid conflicts, but a fraternal fellowship that comes from uniting and not absorbing; from pardoning and not overpowering; from reconciling and not imposing. So great is heaven’s desire for peace that it was proclaimed from the very moment of Christ’s birth: “on earth peace among those whom he favours” (*Lk* 2:14). So great was Jesus’ anguish over the refusal of this gift that he had come to bring, that he wept for Jerusalem, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!” (*Lk* 19:42).

Let us work tirelessly, dear brothers and sisters, for the peace that the Spirit of Jesus and the Father urges us to build: a peace that integrates diversity and promotes unity in plurality. The peace of the Holy Spirit harmonizes differences, whereas the spirit hostile to God and humanity uses diversity as a means of division. Scripture tells us that “the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters” (1 *Jn* 3:10). Dear friends, those who would call themselves Christians must choose which side to take. Those who choose Christ choose peace, always; those who unleash war and violence betray the Lord and deny his Gospel. What Jesus teaches us is clear: we are to love everyone, since everyone is loved as a child of our common Father in heaven. The love of Christians is not only for those close to us, but for everyone, for in Jesus each person is our neighbour, our brother or sister – even our enemies (cf. *Mt* 5: 38-48). How much more true is this of those who are members of the same people, albeit belonging to different ethnic groups. “That you love one another as I have loved you” (*Jn* 15:12): that is Jesus’ commandment, and it contradicts every “tribal” understanding of religion. “That they may all be one” (*Jn* 17:21). That is Jesus’ heartfelt prayer to the Father for all of us who believe.

Let us work together, brothers and sisters, to foster this fraternal unity among ourselves as Christians, and help to bring the message of peace to society by spreading Jesus’ way of non-violence. Those who claim

to be believers should have nothing more to do with a culture based on the spirit of vengeance. The Gospel must not be just a beautiful religious philosophy, but a prophecy that becomes reality in history. Let us work for peace by weaving and mending, not by cutting or tearing. Let us follow Jesus, and in following him, let us walk together on the path to peace (cf. *Lk 1:79*).

After the verbs to pray and to work, we come now to the third verb: *to journey*. In this country, Christian communities have been deeply committed to promoting processes of reconciliation. I thank you for this radiant testimony of faith born of the realization, expressed not only in words but also in deeds, that prior to any historical divisions there remains one unchanging fact, namely, that we are Christians; we belong to Christ. It is a beautiful thing that, amid situations of great conflict, those who profess the Christian faith have never fragmented the people but have been, and continue to be, a factor of unity. This ecumenical tradition of South Sudan is a precious treasure, an act of praise for the name of Jesus and an act of love for the Church his bride, an example to all for the advancement of Christian unity. It is a tradition to be cultivated in that same spirit. The ecclesial divisions of past centuries should not have any impact on those who are being evangelized, and the spread of the Gospel ought to contribute to the growth of greater unity. May the tribalism and the partisan spirit that fuel acts of violence in this country not impair relationships between the various confessions. On the contrary, may

the witness of unity among believers overflow to the people as a whole.

Here, to conclude, I would like to suggest two key words to help us persevere in our journey: *memory* and *commitment*. *Memory*. The steps that you take follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before you. Do not fear that you will not live up to their example, but feel yourselves urged on by those who prepared the way for you. As in a relay race, take hold of their testimony and hold it tight as you run towards the goal of full and visible communion. Then, *commitment*. We journey towards unity when love is concrete, when we join in coming to the aid of the outcast, the wounded and the disenfranchised. You already do this in any number of areas. I think in particular of the sectors of healthcare, education and charitable outreach. How much greatly needed assistance you provide to the people! Thank you for this. Continue to assist them, never acting as competitors but as members of a family, brothers and sisters who, by their compassion for the suffering, the beloved of Jesus, give glory to God and bear witness to the fellowship he loves.

Dear friends, my brothers and I have come, together, as pilgrims to be with you, the holy people of God, on your journey. Even if distance separates us physically, we always remain close to you. Let us set out each day by praying for one another, by working together as witnesses and mediators of the peace of Jesus, and by persevering in the same journey by our practical acts of

charity and unity. In all things, let us love one another constantly and from the heart (cf. *1 Pet* 1:22).

5/ Holy Mass

Homily of His Holiness

“John Garang” Mausoleum (Juba)
Sunday, 5 February 2023

Today I would like to make my own the words that the Apostle Paul addressed to the community of Corinth in the second reading and repeat them here before you: “When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:1-2). Yes, Paul’s concern is also mine, as I gather here with you in the name of Jesus Christ, the God of love, the God who achieved peace through his cross; Jesus, the God crucified for us all; Jesus, crucified in those who suffer; Jesus, crucified in the lives of so many of you, in so many people in this country; Jesus, the risen Lord, the victor over evil and death. I have come here to proclaim him and to confirm you in him, for the message of Christ is a message of hope. Jesus knows your anguish and the hope you bear in your hearts, the joys and struggles that mark your lives, the darkness that assails you and the faith that, like a song in the night, you raise to heaven. Jesus knows you and loves you. If we remain in him, we must never fear, because for us too, every cross will turn into a resurrection, every sadness into hope, and every lament into dancing.

I would like to reflect, then, on the words of life that our Lord Jesus spoke to us in today's Gospel: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:13-14). What do these images say to us, as disciples of Christ?

First of all, that *we are the salt of the earth*. Salt is used to season food. It is the unseen ingredient that gives flavour to everything. Precisely for this reason, since ancient times, salt has been a symbol of wisdom, a virtue that cannot be seen, but that adds zest to life, which without it becomes insipid, tasteless. Yet what kind of wisdom does Jesus mean? He uses the image of salt immediately after teaching his disciples the Beatitudes. We see, then, that the Beatitudes are the salt of the Christian life, because they bring the wisdom of heaven down to earth. They revolutionize the standards of this world and our usual way of thinking. And what do they say? In a word, they tell us that to be blessed, to be happy and fulfilled, we must not aim to be strong, rich and powerful, but humble, meek, merciful; to do no evil to anyone, but to be peacemakers for everyone. This, Jesus says, is the wisdom of a disciple; it is what gives flavour to the world around us. Let us remember this: if we put the Beatitudes into practice, if we embody the wisdom of Christ, we will give savour not only to our own lives, but also to the life of society and of the country in which we live.

Salt does not only bring out flavor; it also has another function, which was essential at the time of

Christ: it preserves food so that it does not spoil and go bad. The Bible had said that there is one “food”, one essential good that is to be preserved above all others, and that is the covenant with God. So in those days, whenever an offering was made to the Lord, a little salt was added to it. Let us hear what Scripture says about this: “You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be lacking from your cereal offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt” (*Lev 2:13*). Salt thus served as a reminder of our basic need to preserve our relationship with God, because he is faithful to us, and his covenant with us is incorruptible, inviolable and enduring (cf. *Num 18:19; 2 Chr 13:5*). It follows that every disciple of Jesus, as the salt of the earth, is a witness to the covenant that God has made and that we celebrate in every Mass: a new, eternal and unbreakable covenant (cf. *1 Cor 11:25; Heb 9*), and a love for us that cannot be shaken even by our infidelity.

Brothers and sisters, we are witnesses to this wonder. In ancient times, when people or peoples established a pact of friendship with one another, they often sealed it by exchanging a little salt. As the salt of the earth, we are called to bear witness to the covenant with God with joy and gratitude, and thus show that we are people capable of creating bonds of friendship and fraternal living. People capable of building good human relationships as a way of curbing the corruption of evil, the disease of division, the filth of fraudulent business dealings and the plague of injustice.

Today I would like to thank you, because you are the salt of the earth in this country. Yet, when you consider its many wounds, the violence that increases the venom of hatred, and the injustice that causes misery and poverty, you may feel small and powerless. Whenever that temptation assails you, try looking at salt and its tiny grains. Salt is a tiny ingredient and, once placed on food, it disappears, it dissolves; yet precisely in that way it seasons the whole dish. In the same way, even though we are tiny and frail, even when our strength seems paltry before the magnitude of our problems and the blind fury of violence, we Christians are able to make a decisive contribution to changing history. Jesus wants us to be like salt: a mere pinch dissolves and gives a different flavour to everything. Consequently, we cannot step back, because without that little pinch, without our small contribution, everything becomes insipid. So let us start from the little things, the essential things, not from what may appear in the history books, but from what changes history. In the name of Jesus and of his Beatitudes, let us lay down the weapons of hatred and revenge, in order to take up those of prayer and charity. Let us overcome the dislikes and aversions that over time have become chronic and risk pitting tribes and ethnic groups against one another. Let us learn to apply the salt of forgiveness to our wounds; salt burns but it also heals. Even if our hearts bleed for the wrongs we have suffered, let us refuse, once and for all, to repay evil with evil, and we will grow healthy within. Let us accept one another and love one another with

sincerity and generosity, as God loves us. Let us cherish the good that we are, and not allow ourselves to be corrupted by evil!

Let us now pass to the second image used by Jesus, which is light: *You are the light of the world*. A great prophecy was told of Israel: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (*Is 49:6*). Now that prophecy has been fulfilled, because God the Father has sent his Son, who is the light of the world (cf. *Jn 8:12*), the true light that enlightens every person and every people, the light that shines in the darkness and dispels every cloud of gloom (cf. *Jn 1:5.9*). Jesus, the light of the world, tells his disciples that they, too, are *the light of the world*. This means that, when we receive the light of Christ, the light that is Christ, we become "luminous"; we radiate the light of God!

Jesus goes on to say: "A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house" (*Mt 5:15*). Again, this was a familiar image in those days. Many villages in Galilee were built on hillsides and were visible from a great distance. Lamps in houses were placed high up, so that they could illumine all the corners of a room. When a lamp was extinguished, it was covered with a piece of terracotta called a "bushel", which deprived the flame of oxygen and thus put out its light.

Brothers and sisters, it is clear what Jesus means by asking us to be the light of the world: we, who are his

disciples, are called to shine forth like a city set on a hill, like a lamp whose flame may never be extinguished. In other words, before we worry about the darkness surrounding us, before we hope that the shadows around us will lighten, we are called to radiate light, to give brightness to our cities, our villages and homes, our acquaintances and all our daily activities by our lives and good works. The Lord will give us strength, the strength to be light in him, so that everyone will see our good works, and seeing them, as Jesus reminds us, they will rejoice in God and give him glory. If we live like sons and daughters, brothers and sisters on earth, people will come to know that all of us have a Father in heaven. We are being asked, then, to burn with love, never to let our light be extinguished, never to let the oxygen of charity fade from our lives so that the works of evil can take away the pure air of our witness. This country, so beautiful yet ravaged by violence, needs the light that each one of you has, or better, the light that each one of you is.

Dear brothers and sisters, I pray that you will be salt that spreads, dissolves and seasons South Sudan with the fraternal taste of the Gospel. May your Christian communities shine radiantly, so that, like cities built on a hill, they will shed the light of goodness on all and show that it is beautiful and possible to live with generosity and self-giving, to have hope, and together to build a reconciled future. Brothers and sisters, I am with you and I assure you of my prayer that you will experience the joy of the Gospel, the savour and the light that the Lord, “the God of peace” (*Phil 4:9*), the

“God of all consolation” (2 *Cor* 1:3), desires to pour out upon every one of you.

Final Remarks of His Holiness Pope Francis

Thank you, dear brother Stephen, for your kind words. I greet the President of the Republic, as well as the civil and religious authorities present. I have now come to the end of this pilgrimage among you, and I want to express my gratitude for the warm welcome given me and for all the work done to prepare for this visit, which was a fraternal visit of three.

I am grateful to all of you, brothers and sisters, who have come here in great numbers from various places, spending many hours, if not days, on the road! I thank you for the affection you have shown me, but also for your faith and your patience, for the good you do and the hardships that you willingly offer to God without growing discouraged but continuing to move forward. South Sudan possesses a courageous Church, with close ties to the Church in Sudan, as the Archbishop noted in referring to [Saint Josephine Bakhita](#), a great woman who by God’s grace transformed into hope all the sufferings that she endured. As Pope Benedict observed: “The hope born in her which had ‘redeemed’ her she could not keep to herself; this hope had to reach many, to reach everybody” (*Spe Salvi*, 3). Hope is the word I would leave with each of you, as a gift to share, a seed to bear fruit. As Saint Josephine reminds us, women, especially here, are a sign of hope, and in a

special way I thank and bless all the women of the country.

To hope, I would associate another word, the word that has echoed in these days: *peace*. I came here with my brothers Justin and Iain, whom I sincerely thank; the three of us jointly will continue to accompany your steps and do all we can to make them steps of peace, steps to peace. I would like to entrust this path of the entire people together with the three of us, this path of reconciliation and peace, to another woman. She is our most loving Mother Mary, Queen of Peace. She has accompanied us with her caring and quiet presence. We pray to her now, and we entrust to her the cause of peace in South Sudan and in the entire African continent. To Our Lady we also entrust peace in our world, especially in the many countries at war, like Ukraine, which suffers so greatly.

Dear brothers and sisters, the three of us are returning to our own homes, with you even closer to our hearts. Let me repeat: you are in our hearts, you are in our hearts, you are in the hearts of Christians worldwide! Never lose hope. And lose no opportunity to build peace. May hope and peace dwell among you. May hope and peace dwell in South Sudan!