



ADVENT – CHRISTMAS 2014

Superior General's Message



Madonna e bambino:
Gerardo Dottori, 1924 –
Italy

My reflection this Christmas was inspired by, and I would like to draw your attention to, a significant event which took place on 2nd December 2014 at the Vatican which passed by quietly, but which, I believe, has a great potential for making the work of the Saviour – God's saving love – effective.

Pope Francis, together with 12 other faith leaders (including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew from Greece and senior representatives of the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist faiths), gathered at the Vatican to adopt a Joint Declaration Against Modern Slavery – a ground-

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family!

In the mystery of the Incarnation - God becoming human in the person of Jesus and taking on everything of the human condition - the dignity of every human being is acknowledged and affirmed; we are reminded that every person is a child of God, created in the image and likeness of God and unconditionally loved by God.

At the birth of Jesus the Angel announced to the shepherds: *"Do not be afraid; I bring you **good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day...a Saviour, who is Christ, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.**"*

Fear is driven away by this **good news of joy** for everyone: the Saviour, seen in the form of a small, weak, helpless and poor child, is here to liberate all people with his love. Unbelievable Good News indeed to contemplate!

This Christmas, many of us will celebrate with beautiful, well-planned and prayerful liturgies; carol singing; meals with family and friends; gift giving and receiving. I wish you every blessing in your preparations because, surely, this is a

worthy and important event to celebrate.

However the meaning and effects of Christmas is not just a once-a-year affair; it does not cease with nice celebrations on 25th December! Rather, the event of the birth of Jesus as the Saviour of the world is a daily grace and is to be made visible and effective in and through our daily lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Millions of people in our world are living in the hope of being liberated from their many forms of exploitation and slavery; they are yearning to be accepted and loved as human beings with dignity; and they are seeking for equal opportunities and rights for the basic needs of life.

The Christmas event of the birth of Jesus (God) into our world and the good news of his saving love for all people needs to be communicated. As Passionists, we are engaged in this immense task of bringing this **"good news of great joy for all people"** in our own humble ways and in our various contexts and diverse situations throughout the Congregation.

"I wish you and all your loved ones the blessings of peace and joy of this Christmas time"



breaking initiative "to eradicate modern slavery" by 2020.

The declaration stated: "Modern slavery, in terms of human trafficking, forced labour and prostitution, organ trafficking, and any relationship that fails to respect the fundamental conviction that all people are equal and have the same freedom and dignity, is a crime against humanity."

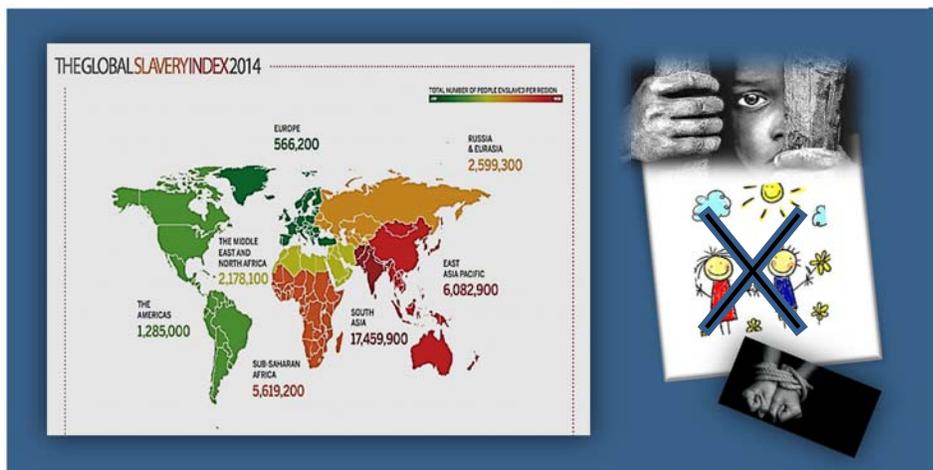
The extraordinary thing, however, was that this historic meeting was largely inspired by the determination of an Australian schoolgirl, Grace Forrest (now 21), the daughter of a mining billionaire Andrew "Twiggy" Forrest.

Grace Forrest was 15 years old when she went on a school exposure trip to Nepal, having chosen to work in a refuge home for children who had been rescued from sex slavery.

"That experience changed the course of my life," she said. "To see something and walk away, that's unacceptable to me. Seeing the physical, emotional and mental trauma of children as young as three who have been rescued from slavery is unbelievable. And to watch children who have had not just their innocence stolen from them, but also their childhood, left to live with trauma for the rest of their lives ... I came back from this experience and I really wanted to do something."

Grace returned to Nepal two years later with her family and experienced a bigger shock. She found none of the children were still at the orphanage where she had worked. "I started asking questions - where are the records? I was told 'there are no records'. I showed pictures; the reply was 'we have never seen these children'. The driver who took us out there was saying 'this is a bad place, this is a very bad place.'"

Grace says, "To realise at the age of 17 that these children ... had been abused again, and had fallen through the cracks because no-one was watching was a pretty eye-opening experience and made it very raw and real for our family. From there we felt a responsibility."



Grace with her father took the first steps in creating the Walk Free Foundation, an anti-slavery organisation that last year joined forces with the Vatican to launch the Global Freedom Network, which was behind the December 2 multi-faith declaration.

"There's immense pride," Grace Forrest said. "I feel like a puppet for hundreds of thousands of girls who are voiceless - if I can stand for them, that is what I'm here to do."

Pope Francis said, "Modern slavery continues to be an atrocious scourge present on a large scale throughout the world. It is hidden behind closed doors, in homes, in the streets, in cars, in factories, in fields, [and] in fishing boats...in both cities and villages, in the slums of the richest and poorest nations of the world." He called on people of faith, governments and businesses to support and join the movement against slavery.

He said that everyone is born with the same dignity and freedom, and that anything that hurts this is an abhorrent crime against humanity. Everyone is called to action, he said; we must deplore everything depriving people of their God-given dignity.

Pope Francis concluded his remarks with these words: "I pray that the Lord will grant us the grace to become a neighbour to all persons, without exception, and to provide active support whenever we encounter on our way an elderly person abandoned by all; an unjustly enslaved and mistreated worker; a

refugee caught in the snares of crime; a young person walking the streets of the world, a victim of the sex trade; a man or a woman tricked into prostitution by people with no fear of God; a child mutilated for his or her organs, all of whom call out to our consciences, echoing the voice of the Lord: I assure you that whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

As we once again reflect on and celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Saviour, let us become conscious in a deeper way of the people around us who are screaming out for our attention, or perhaps those who have no voice to call out because of being trapped and silenced in situations of exploitation and slavery. Let us garner our forces in ministry and collaborate with organisations and people of good will in order to identify the many people around us who are denied humane treatment and their just rights, and let us aim to restore to them their dignity as children of God.

I wish you and all your loved ones the blessings of peace and joy of this Christmas time.

Faternally,

Fr Joachim Rego CP
Superior General