



Dear Muslim brothers and sisters,

Dear Christian brothers and sisters,

*May the Lord grant you His peace!*

In this year 1447 AH and 2026 AD, our two communities have begun together their month of fasting, prayer, and sharing. Together, on our own paths, faithful to our respective traditions but under God's gaze, we strive to transform our lives for the better and draw closer to the Most High and the path He desires for us in this world.

These paths of authentic inner conversion—as we know from experience—are not easy to traverse, so heavily do habits and sin weigh upon us. But they are not the only things that pose a danger to our earthly pilgrimage in truth with God. The world around us also exerts its influence, intruding upon our breaking of the fast, our diligent reading of the Word of God, and our social interactions. This year again, violence has erupted in the midst of our holy months. Images of war are imprinted on our minds and add to the climate of uncertainty that has marked these past months.

Our world does indeed seem to be going through a strange period where the law of the strongest prevails over international mediation; where fear of the other calls into question the models of communal life inherited from history and the lessons of past tragedies; where young people in so many countries cry out their despair at a future from which they feel excluded; where opinions amplified by social media algorithms fuel the spiral of absurdity or its companion, simplistic Manichaeism; where, ultimately, words lose their truth value and appear only as provocation or a formless cry of self-affirmation. This multifaceted violence is everywhere, in the geopolitical arena as well as on national political stages, in workplaces as well as in cafes, in religious communities as well as in families. Everyone is exposed to a new and ever-increasing dose of violence, misunderstanding, and injustice, the new front that has just opened in the Middle East being, alas, only the tragic epiphany of this process.

What should we, as believers, do in the face of such an outburst that challenges humanity's fundamental yearning for peace?...

In these sacred months of ours, we believe that God calls us to intensify our prayer for peace, so that everyone may live in just conditions, in security, with an open future. By giving us the grace to fast, God also invites us to experience lack, to expose ourselves to our own fragility and powerlessness, especially in the face of this world that we struggle to make more humane. Finally, by calling us to sharing and reconciliation with our brothers and sisters, God invites us, after prayer and from the depths of the fundamental powerlessness we recognize within ourselves as creatures, to dare to take concrete steps toward our brothers and sisters: no lasting peace will be achieved without these tiny, small gestures of reconciliation at the local level and in each of our hearts. This is where our fundamental conversion takes place, in these personal and community initiatives that will affirm our faith that peace is from God and that it will always be stronger than the desires for hatred and revenge.



On this path, a man opens new possibilities for us. This is Saint Francis of Assisi, whose 800th death anniversary we commemorate this year. Francis (1181-1226) was a man of his time, enamored of life and freedom. He had known wealth, but he chose to become a brother to all, and especially to the most vulnerable. He had known war and violence, having himself participated in the war against the neighboring city of Perugia and later being a powerless witness to the Fifth Crusade at Damietta. He experienced the words that destroy and kill within the very religious family he had founded: "We are so many and such that we have no need of you" (in *The Perfect Joy*). The desire to take everything back into his own hands and to impose the project and the truth that had been entrusted to him by God, he also felt it in the deepest part of himself... In his own time, he therefore experienced the confrontation with the multifaceted violence that we mentioned earlier.

On this path, he could have allowed himself to be overcome and consumed by violence. He would then have lost God's very gift, peace ("However great the sin committed, the servant of God may be wounded in his love for the offended God, but he must never lose peace of mind or become angry: in doing so, he would unjustly claim for himself a right that belongs only to God: to judge a fault." *Admonition 11*). For the danger lies fundamentally there: by allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed by unjust violence, we enter ourselves into the cycle of revenge and thus lose our souls by becoming like the one who attacked us.

Francis then seems to open another path for us, a path that may have been revealed to him—or at least strengthened—by his encounter with the Ayyubid Sultan Malik al-Kamil in Damietta one autumn day in 1219. When Francis returned to Italy and was tasked with writing the Rule of Life for the friars, he wrote that one way to approach Muslims was to “not engage in lawsuits or disputes, but to submit to every human being for God’s sake” (*Regula non bullata 16.6*), echoing the *First Letter of Saint Peter (1 Peter 2:13)*. This submission to the Almighty, which he had witnessed in his Muslim interlocutors, he gradually extended to all beings (from prelates to other believers, from humans to wild animals), and all this for God’s sake and God’s alone. In doing so, he opens up for us the prospect of a new relational path that is neither weakness, nor resignation, nor self-annihilation, for Francis denies nothing of what he embodies (neither his faith nor the way he lives his vocation). Rather, it is above all a refusal to lay a hand on the other, to impose anything upon him, even for his own good. This submission arises from an astonishing clarity of vision that allows Francis to understand that to impose oneself upon the other is to take God's place and thus to arrogate to oneself a place to which one has no right as a creature. In a more Christian perspective, this would amount to denying the very way in which God reveals Himself in Jesus on the Cross (*1 Corinthians 1:18*).

In this jubilee year of the death of Saint Francis, it is this good news of a “disarming and disarmed” submission (in the words of Pope Leo XIV) that we would like to offer you. It is as revolutionary for Christians as it is for Muslims, so much does it challenge our need to protect ourselves and defend what seems to us to be truth and justice. Indeed, it is more divine than human in dimension. Yet, this treasure, Francis, has bequeathed to us to help us break the endless cycle of violence and peace imposed by



force. Will we dare to respond to hatred with self-giving and with trust in the presence of God at the heart of every life (even that of the one who slanders us)? Will we dare, for God's sake, to forgive and believe that a future is possible that allows the other to be himself? Will we dare to trust despite everything, because without trust, life is not possible and evil will have won its ultimate victory within us by locking us in on ourselves?...

Humbly, from the depths of our shared life experiences across the globe, with the poorest and with all cultures, we wish to offer you this path of life amidst the darkness of our suffering world. May you have a blessed month of Ramadan and a blessed Lent: may these be times when we learn to live in ways that please God for humanity and for all of the creation He entrusted to us.

*The General Commission of the Order of Friars Minor for the service of Dialogue*