

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

*Christians and Muslims:
Beneficiaries and Instruments of Divine Mercy*

MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF RAMADAN
AND 'Id al-Fitr 1437 H. / 2016 A.D.

Vatican City

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters,

1. The month of Ramadan and *'Id al-Fitr* is an important religious event for Muslims around the world, focused on fasting, prayer and good deeds, and is esteemed by Christians, your friends and neighbours. On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Christians all over the world, we extend best wishes for a spiritually rewarding fast, supported by good deeds, and for a joyful feast.

As is our cherished custom, we wish to share with you on this occasion some reflections in the hope of strengthening the spiritual bonds we share.

2. A theme that is close to the hearts of Muslims and Christians alike is mercy.

We know that Christianity and Islam both believe in a merciful God, who shows his mercy and compassion towards all his creatures, in particular the human family. He created us out of an immense love. He is merciful in caring for each of us, bestowing upon us the gifts we need for our daily life, such as food, shelter and security. God's mercy is manifested in a particular way, however, through the pardon of our faults; hence he is the one who pardons (*al-Ghâfir*), but the one who pardons much and always (*al-Ghafour*).

3. To underscore the importance of mercy, His Holiness Pope Francis declared a *Jubilee Year of Mercy* to be celebrated from 8 December 2015 to 20 November 2016. In this regard he said: "Here... is the reason for the Jubilee: because this is the time for mercy. It is the favorable time to heal wounds, a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and to touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God, a time to offer everyone, everyone, the way of forgiveness and reconciliation" ("Homily", 11 April 2015).

Your pilgrimage (*hajj*) to the Holy places, mainly Mecca and Medina, is surely a special time for you to experience God's mercy. In fact, among the well-known aspirations addressed to Muslim pilgrims is: "I wish you a blessed pilgrimage, praiseworthy efforts and the pardon of your sins". Making a pilgrimage to obtain God's pardon for sins, both for the living and dead, is truly a salient custom practice among believers.

4. We, Christians and Muslims, are called to do our best to imitate God. He, the Merciful, asks us to be merciful and compassionate towards others, especially those who are in any kind of need. So too he calls us to be forgiving of one another.

When we gaze upon humanity today, we are saddened to see so many victims of conflicts and violence – here we think in particular of the elderly, and children and

women, especially those who fall prey to human trafficking and the many people who suffer from poverty, illness, natural disasters and unemployment.

5. We cannot close our eyes to these realities, or turn away from these sufferings. It is true that situations are often very complex and that their solution exceeds our capacities. It is vital, therefore, that all work together in assisting those in need. It is a source of great hope when we experience or hear of Muslims and Christians joining hands to help the needy. When we do join hands, we heed an important command in our respective religions and show forth God's mercy, thus offering a more credible witness, individually and communally, to our beliefs.

May the Merciful and Almighty God help us to walk always along the path of goodness and compassion!

6. We join our prayerful good wishes to those of Pope Francis for abundant blessings during Ramadan and for a lasting joy of *'Id al-Fitr*.

Happy Feast to you all!

From the Vatican, 10 June 2016

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