

Articles of Interest
For
1 January 2023

Sunday, 25 December 2022 — *Christmas Day*

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Fifty-Two: Nothing Stands Alone
Summary

We Are the Beloved

On this Christmas Day, Father Richard describes intimacy with God as a loving “yes” to Divine Presence:

For Christians who have gone to their own depths, there is the uncovering of an indwelling Presence—a deep, loving “yes” inherent within us. In Christian theology, this inner Presence would be described as the Holy Spirit, which is precisely God as immanent, within, and even our deepest, truest self. God is the very ground of our Being.

Some mystics have described this Presence as “closer to me than I am to myself” or “more me than I am myself.” Many of us would also describe this, as Thomas Merton did, as the True Self. Yet it still must be awakened and chosen. The Holy Spirit is *totally given and given equally to all*, but must be consciously received, too. The Presence needs to be recognized, honored, and drawn upon to become a living Presence within us.

From this more spacious and grounded place, one naturally connects, empathizes, forgives, and loves just about everything.

We were made in love, for love, and unto love, and it is out of this love that we act. This deep inner “yes” that is God in me, is already loving God through me. [1]

Author and spiritual teacher Henri Nouwen (1932–1996) invites us to our own prayerful experience as beloved by God:

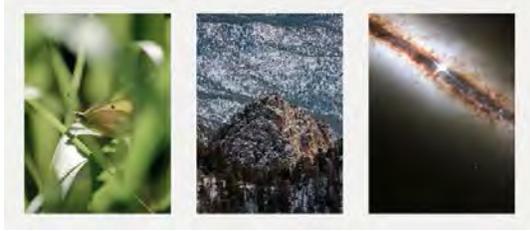
We are the Beloved. We are intimately loved long before our parents, teachers, spouses, children and friends loved or wounded us. That’s the truth of our lives. That’s the truth I want you to claim for yourself. That’s the truth spoken by the voice that says, “You are my Beloved” [see Mark 1:9–11].

Listening to that voice with great inner attentiveness, I hear at my center words that say: “I have called you by name, from the very beginning. You are mine and I am yours. You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother’s womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace. I look at you with infinite tenderness and care for you with a care more intimate than that of a mother for her child. I have counted every hair on your head and guided you at every step. Wherever you go, I go with you, and wherever you rest, I keep watch. I will give you food that will satisfy all your hunger and drink that will quench all your thirst. I will not hide my face from you. You know me as your own as I know you as my own. You belong to me. I am your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your lover and your spouse . . . yes, even your child . . . wherever you are I will be. Nothing will ever separate us. We are one.” [2]

Monday, 26 December 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Fifty-Two: Nothing Stands Alone
Summary

Converted to the Trinity

The 2022 Daily Meditations theme has been Nothing Stands Alone. Father Richard understands relationship as the very nature of God and reality, expressed through the doctrine of the Trinity.

The genius of the Trinitarian doctrine has the power to rearrange our universe. We know nothing about this being called God, except that this God is perfect giving and perfect receiving. The very nature of this Being we call God is communion, receptivity, and generosity, one hundred percent unhindered dialogue between three. It all begins with three. This isn't just an abstraction; it's the foundational template of reality. Reality is total, continual givenness and perfect, humble receptivity; that is the very form and the shape of being as we know it. It is the very source, the very pattern, and the very goal of reality.

The wonderful thing about living in our time is that scientists like astronomers and physicists say that this is true. Many looking through microscopes or telescopes see this same pattern of utter relationship. They are discovering that if reality is anything, it's absolutely relational. It's something we used to know, something our ancestors knew. But pretty much since the Enlightenment, at least in the West, we've dismissed the possibility. We've been producing

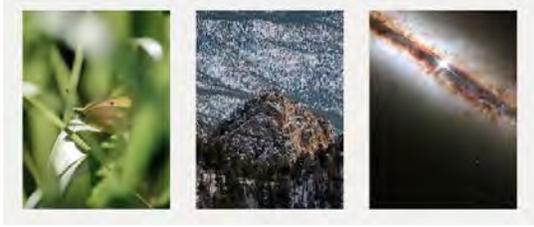
individualists who try to save themselves by believing things intellectually. In this view of religion, it's not a mystery of participation. It's not a mystery of surrendering; no surrender is even necessary. Instead, it's a quest to get the right information, which only makes us prouder and more self-centered. It makes community less possible, which is clearly evident from our politics and our international relations. Everyone is put back upon themselves, where the only question we're able to ask is "*How can I get to heaven?*" That's not even a gospel question! It's a question of the ego. It's not the question of the Trinity within us.

The conversion that's needed right now is to this foundational definition of God as relationship. Only people who submit to that conversion can possibly be converted to Jesus and not have their faith distorted. When there isn't a primary understanding of who Jesus is as part of the Trinity, Jesus will be used for our own nationalistic and egocentric purposes, as a means of power and a ticket to heaven. Can we all be converted, not to Jesus (as strange as that must sound) but to the Trinity, where Jesus Christ actually exists? Only inside the mystery of the Trinity can we begin to understand what Jesus is saying, and what the meaning of salvation is, and what the mystery is that he's inviting us into.

Tuesday, 27 December 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Fifty-Two: Nothing Stands Alone
Summary

Jesus' Person-to-Person Ministry

Richard writes about how Jesus' ministry reveals that true conversion stems from relationship, not words; from experience, not belief:

The ego loves to use words, but the primary way we communicate “the reign of God is at hand” is by our presence. Jesus clearly modeled this. It seems that Jesus and his disciples took up residence in people’s homes and lived as closely as possible to the people. In their ministry, healing and preaching are so intertwined that we could say that there has been no real proclaiming of the kingdom, no authentic conversion, unless there is healing in some real sense.

Understandably, many of us have come to rely on an impersonal medium like the printed word. But the only way words can have any effect on our lives is if a person is coming across through this medium. When I am preaching, teaching, or writing, I have to try to give myself away; I have to let others encounter me in some real way. That’s the only experience that will make any of my words halfway believable. Jesus gave us words, but more significantly, he gave his “flesh” for the life of the world—in the way he lived and the way he died.

In Luke’s Gospel, all of Jesus’ rules of ministry—his “tips for the road”—are very interpersonal. They are based on putting

people in touch with people. Person-to-person is the way the gospel was originally communicated. Person-in-love-with-person, person-respecting-person, person-forgiving-person, person-touching-person, person-crying-with-person, person-hugging-person: that’s where the Spirit is so beautifully present. [1]

Brian McLaren describes how Jesus' invitation to participate in "God's kingdom" impacts relationships, person by person:

The same thing happens with teachers, politicians, lawyers, engineers, and salespeople who take seriously their identity as participants in the kingdom of God. The way they teach, the way they develop public policies, the way they seek justice, the way they design and work with resources from God’s creation, the way they buy and sell—all of these are given dignity in the context of God’s kingdom, and soon, transformation begins to happen. After all, when you see your students, constituency, clients, or customers as people who are loved by God and as your fellow citizens in God’s kingdom, it becomes harder to rip them off or give them second best. And when enough people begin to live with that viewpoint, in little ways as well as big ones, over long periods of time, things truly change. . . .

Life for them now is about an interactive relationship—reconciled to God, reconciled to one another—and so they see their entire lives as an opportunity to make the beautiful music of God’s kingdom so that more and more people will be drawn into it, and so that the world will be changed by their growing influence. Everyone can have a role in this expanding kingdom. [2]

Wednesday, 28 December 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Fifty-Two: Nothing Stands Alone
Summary

A Capacity for Communion

Catholic spirituality author Judy Cannato writes that our freedom, gifts, and interdependence bring us to a holy obligation:

In Jesus' final discourse he found it necessary to speak to his disciples about unity, "That they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:11, 22). To add emphasis Jesus prays these words twice. Indeed, they are the heart of his mission and message. Jesus' radical unity with the Holy One defined his life, and his prayer indicates that he wants that same radical unity to define those who follow. . . .

Connectedness is fundamental to our reality. No matter which sphere of life we observe, from the physical to the spiritual, we are connected to others. . . . Many of the social and ecological problems that confront us today stem from our delusion that we are separate from, better, or more significant than, other members of creation—from other groups of people we encounter to the air we breathe. Our lack of openness to all may very well mean our demise.

If we are to expand our hearts to include all creation we need to *embrace our capacity for communion*. . . . Relationship is something that all life requires, even inorganic life. Our vitality depends upon the

connections we establish and the communion we share. [1]

Minister and faith leader Jen Bailey writes to encourage the "misfits," those on society's edges, to see themselves as essential to a healthy, sustaining, and interdependent future:

All around us things are shifting, systems are collapsing, and institutions are failing. This should not surprise us. Around the world, elders across cultures and peoples were predicting this time would come. It is a time of great uncovering in which Mother Earth and Father Sky are pushing us into a divine reckoning about what it means to be in right relationship with one another and all sentient beings in the twenty-first century and beyond. It is clear to me that the actions we take now will have deep and irreversible consequences for the generations to come.

The good news is that this time is made for misfits.

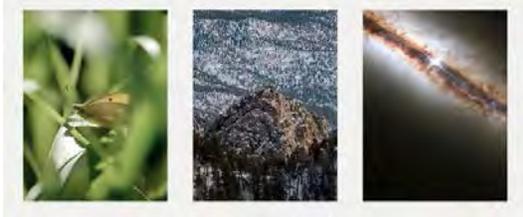
When you are at the center of a circle, it is impossible to see what is at the perimeter—if you are even aware that there is a perimeter. As misfits who were pushed to the edges and in-between places, we are able to see what is on the horizon and collectively discern what is needed to meet the challenges ahead. We are called to be the gardeners who will compost and tend to the soil upon which future generations will sow seeds that will one day blossom. . . .

The great news is we do not have to take on these challenges alone. In the words of the great prayer created in honor of Bishop Oscar Romero, "We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well." [2] [3]

Thursday, 29 December 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Fifty-Two: Nothing Stands Alone
Summary

Remaining in Communion

In this homily, Father Richard illustrates our inherent union with God—and the small self that keeps us separate.

We go through our lives, our years on this earth, thinking of ourselves as separate. That sense of separateness basically causes every stupid, sinful, silly thing we ever do. The little, separate self takes offense when people don't show us proper respect. The separate self lies and steals and does unkind things to other people. When we're separate, everything becomes about protecting and defending ourselves. It can consume our lives.

One word for overcoming that false sense of separateness, that illusory self, is heaven, and, quite frankly, that is what death offers us. It is simply returning to the Source from which we came, where all things are One. The whole gospel message is radical union with God, with neighbor, and even with ourselves. I think that's why so many of us are drawn to church each week—to receive communion and to eventually, hopefully, realize that we are *in communion*.

Probably no gospel story says this more clearly and forthrightly than the parable of the vine and the branches (John 15:1–10). Jesus says, "I'm the vine, God is the vine grower, and you (we) are the branches." As long as we remain in that relationship, we

are in love and in union. Whenever we do anything unloving, at that moment, we're out of union. Even if it's just a negative, angry, or judgmental thought, we're doing that out of a sense of disunion—always! And Jesus is very clear. He says that state is useless. Once the branch is cut off from the vine, we might as well throw it into the fire because it's not going to bear any fruit. He's not making a threat. He's just talking practically, as if he were the vineyard owner.

Now, that's a pretty strong statement about us and the choices we make from that unnecessary state of separateness. We have never been separate from God except in our thoughts, but our thoughts don't make it true! Nor are we separate from anyone else. Whatever separates us from one another—nationality, religion, ethnicity, economics, language—those are all just accidentals that will all pass away. We are One in God, with Christ and with one another. "I am the vine and you are the branches" (John 15:5). If only we could live that way every hour!

We all pull back into ourselves. We pout and complain and resent and fear. That's what the little self does. The little self, the branch cut off from the vine, can do nothing according to this gospel. So Jesus says, "Remain in me as I remain in you" (John 15:4). The promise is constant from God's side. The only question is from our side. Do we choose to live in that union? Every time we do something with respect, with love, with sympathy, with compassion, with caring, with service, we are operating in union.

2022 saw opposition to Pope Francis, plus intellectual and ecclesial shifts



Pope Francis in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Dec. 3, 2022 (CNS/Vatican Media)



BY MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS

26 December 2022

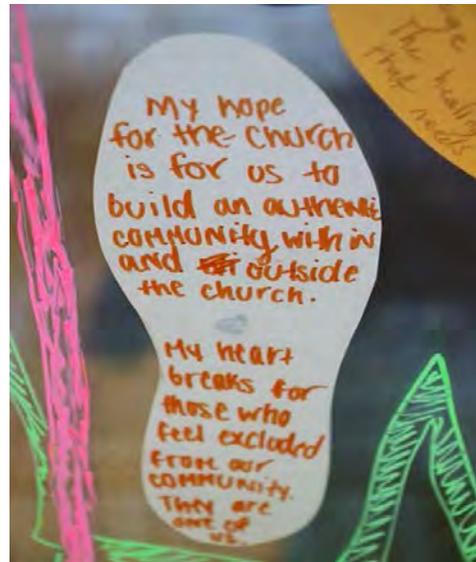
The year 2022 in the Catholic world was dominated by significant shifts in the intellectual and ecclesial landscape, accompanied by shockingly few shifts among key personnel in the Vatican Curia and at the headquarters of the U.S. bishops' conference. Pope Francis continues to invite the church to try new approaches with the goal of retrieving our tradition more fruitfully, even while here in the United States he encounters a great deal of opposition.

[Synodality](#) was the biggest story of 2022 — or it might be. The process has begun and no

one is sure how it will end, but already we are seeing signs of its effect.

As NCR board member Jim Purcell, who was heavily involved in the synodal process in his parish and diocese, [noted](#), "I have witnessed again and again the animating power of the Holy Spirit that is at the heart of a synodal church." Again and again, people [reported](#) how nice it was to feel listened to, how for many it was the first time anyone had asked for their input.

The practice in the U.S. church for most of the 20th and early 21st centuries has been for the bishops to consult among themselves and then tell the rest of us what they concluded was for our own good. The pattern was set by Pope Pius X in his 1906 encyclical letter [Vehementer Nos](#), in which he declared, "The one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors."



A student's message about participating in listening sessions in preparation for the 2023 world Synod of Bishops on synodality is seen April 4, 2022, at La Salle University in Philadelphia. (CNS/CatholicPhilly.com/Sarah Webb)

The funny thing is that for synodality to work, we all need to learn to be docile to the Holy Spirit, and the pastors need to learn this, too. The American penchant for pragmatism and our contemporary [predilection to activism](#) are as much a hurdle to effective synodality as is the history of exclusively hierarchic governance.

We should also be concerned that the [disdain for synodality](#) shown by some prominent conservatives and by the conservative Catholic media conglomerate EWTN risks underrepresenting the voices of the millions of conservative Catholics.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops did a fine job [collating the various diocesan synodal reports](#), as well as the report from Region XVI, which grouped various non-diocesan lay organizations.

The final report was overseen by Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas, who chairs the bishops' Committee on Doctrine, and it showed: Flores is a conservative thinker with a pastoral heart, very much sympathetic with Francis but equally at home among the ideas and cultural attitudes found in prior pontificates.

It was shocking Flores did not get more votes in the November election for the bishops' conference presidency. Instead, the worst remaining remnant of the John Paul II era, a protégé of the late Cardinal Angelo Sodano, is in charge. Archbishop Timothy Broglio's [election](#) as president of the conference was dispiriting, unless you are a right-wing plutocrat like Tim Busch or conservative apparatchik like Leonard Leo. Busch recently [posted](#) a picture of him dining with both Broglio and Leo and a gaggle of other clergy at a high-end Italian restaurant in D.C. Adults are free to dine

with whomever they wish, but the fact that Busch posted the picture was revealing.

At a press conference after his election, Broglio [deflected questions](#) about clergy sex abuse during his tenure as chief of cabinet to Sodano, falsely saying the accusations against Legion of Christ founder Fr. Marcial Maciel only emerged after Broglio had moved on. He left the Vatican in 2001 and the allegations were published [in 1997](#). It will be interesting to see how Broglio handled sex abuse cases once he did move on, becoming nuncio to the Dominican Republic in 2001, and then at the U.S. military archdiocese.



Pope Francis greets Archbishop Timothy Broglio, newly elected president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, during a meeting with the presidents and coordinators of the regional assemblies of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican Nov. 28, 2022. (CNS/Vatican Media)

The majority of the U.S. episcopate may be looking to the next papacy. As Australian Jesuit Fr. Bill Uren recently [noted at La Croix](#), "Thus, the American bishops in electing Archbishop Broglio and seeming to embrace a restorationist agenda are not necessarily embracing a forlorn cause. Their fortunes and those of their Republican sponsors may be restored overnight by the election of a pope more in the mold of John Paul II or Benedict XVI than that of Pope Francis."

There are plenty of Catholics who continue to abhor Francis. He certainly has turned the world upside down for a kind of conservative Catholic who has reduced religion to ethics and thence to politics.

The most glaring examples of this came in the latter half of the year: Francis [received Jesuit Fr. James Martin](#), known for his ministry to gay Catholics, in audience and he [defrocked](#) pro-life activist and Donald Trump apologist, now-former Fr. Frank Pavone. You could hear the heads at EWTN exploding!

This time last year, I [offered the hope](#) that "it seems that in 2022, Francis will put the pedal to the metal." Certainly, [naming San Diego's Bishop Robert McElroy a cardinal](#) showed a pope willing to send a strong signal. As I wrote last year, "Mindful of Francis' preference for the peripheries, I would expect any new American cardinal to come from a diocese that has never had a cardinal before and probably from a border diocese as well."



Pope Francis leads a consistory for the creation of 20 new cardinals in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Aug. 27, 2022. (CNS/Vatican Media)

In other ways, Francis has not advanced his agenda in ways his champions had anticipated. Leaving Cardinal Marc Ouellet in charge of the Dicastery for Bishops is baffling. There were some excellent appointments in the U.S. church:

Archbishop [Shelton Fabre](#) in Louisville, Kentucky; Bishop [John Dolan](#) in Phoenix; Bishop Jeffrey Fleming as coadjutor in Great Falls-Billings, Montana; and, [just last week](#), two stellar auxiliary bishops in Washington, D.C., Bishop-elect Juan Esposito-Garcia and Bishop-elect Evelio Menjivar-Ayala.

Still, as the voting showed at the U.S. bishops' meeting, Team Francis is still losing by about 30 votes in key races, the same margin as in years past. In the Catholic Church, as much as in the realm of politics, personnel is policy.

Ideas matter, too, in the Catholic Church, and the most significant intellectual development in the life of the church this year was the emphatic reinstatement of just war theory as the principal Catholic moral approach to violence. When the NCR staff gathered to suggest nominees for [Catholic Newsmaker of the Year](#), I nominated St. Augustine, the father of just war theory.

Two years ago, Catholic peace activists were [championing](#) Francis' concerns about just war theory in his encyclical [Fratelli Tutti](#). Pax Christi hosted two conferences in Rome [earlier in the pontificate](#), advocating a change in magisterial teaching to prioritize pacifism.

Alas, the peace activists were not prescient. Pacifism, as a theory, cannot reckon with the evil someone like Vladimir Putin can unleash. Efforts at nonviolent resistance within Ukraine are heroic, to be sure, but inadequate. Declarations about the value of pacifism from outside Ukraine are morally suspect or worse.

Francis' ambivalence about the war in Ukraine does not seem to be the consequence of a divided mind or heart, but of a divided role. The vicar of Christ cannot

be championing military efforts by any nation, but in his role as a moral leader, any semblance of evenhandedness between the combatants is morally obscene.

There is no good answer to this conundrum. "War is an ugly thing," even when it is just, "but it is not the ugliest of things" as John Stuart Mill observed.

Catholic intellectual life also presents one of the biggest underreported stories of 2022: the continued drift of theology departments and confused sense of Catholic identity at many of our institutions of higher learning.

With the ending of COVID-related travel restrictions, it is again possible to visit college campuses, and every time I do, someone will approach me to complain about the culture of intellectual conformity and mediocrity on campus. Sometimes it is a student, sometimes a teacher, but the refrain is the same: Our Catholic intellectual tradition is being shunted aside. More on this in the weeks ahead.



Nuns hold the national flags of Poland and Ukraine as they prepare to greet Pope Francis during his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Aug. 3, 2022. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Let's finish on a note that is, if not exactly happier, at least more uncontroversially Catholic: 2022 has been a year when the Catholic Church as an institution stood guard at the borders of the world, attempting

to restore human dignity to those forced to those borders by the violence of poverty and war.

At our national border with Mexico, [Catholic Charities](#) has been deeply engaged in meeting the humanitarian and spiritual needs of migrants. And, along the border with Ukraine, Catholic [Poland](#) rose up as one to welcome refugees from the conflict.

It was astonishing that as millions of Ukrainians reached the border in such a short time, there were no tents, no refugee camps. People opened their homes. Archbishop [Borys Gudziak](#) thanked the people and clergy of the U.S. church for their generous humanitarian support, in one of the few highlights of the November plenary [U.S. bishops' meeting](#).

At a time when revanchist nationalism tries to enlist Catholicism as an ally, the church's daily witness of welcoming migrants and refugees shows the futility of that enlistment. A church that stops caring for migrants and refugees is no longer a Christian or Catholic Church.

These were the ecclesial issues and stories that loomed largest in 2022. Wednesday, I will look back at the year in politics and at the estuary where politics and religion intersect.

Pope Francis: 'It is not truly Christmas without the poor'

Francis cites example of St. Oscar Romero at Christmas Eve Mass

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Pope Francis carries a figurine of the baby Jesus at the conclusion of Christmas Eve Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican in this Dec. 24, 2021, file photo. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



BY CHRISTOPHER WHITE

Rome — 24 December 2022

Pope Francis marked the start of Christmas at the Vatican by cautioning that it is impossible to celebrate the birth of Jesus without concern for the poor.

"Let us remember that it is not truly Christmas without the poor," said the pope, during a Dec. 24 Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. "Without the poor, we can celebrate Christmas, but not the birth of Jesus."

Francis — who has consistently prioritized the plight of the poor throughout his nearly decade-long papacy — marked his 10th Christmas Eve at the Vatican by again elevating the marginalized during his homily.

"Jesus was born poor, lived poor and died poor; he did not so much talk about poverty as live it, to the very end, for our sake," the pope said. "From the manger to the cross,

his love for us was always palpable, concrete."

"From birth to death, the carpenter's son embraced the roughness of the wood, the harshness of our existence," he continued. "He did not love us only in words; he loved us with utter seriousness!"

In that same sense, Francis said anyone who truly wanted to celebrate Christmas must not be distracted by decorations, gifts and other forms of consumerism, but instead, find concrete ways to help out the poor.

"He who was born in the manger, demands a concrete faith, made up of adoration and charity, not empty words and superficiality," the pope said. "He who lay naked in the manger and hung naked on the cross, asks us for truth, he asks us to go to the bare reality of things, and to lay at the foot of the manger all our excuses, our justifications and our hypocrisies."

The pope was joined by some 25 cardinals, 15 bishops, 200 priests and an estimated 7,000 mass-goers inside the basilica and another 3,000 outside in St. Peter's Square — the largest number of attendees at the annual Mass since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Francis implored those in attendance to look to the manger, where Christ was born, to rediscover the true meaning of Christmas.

"We are called to be a church that worships a Jesus who is poor and that serves him in the poor," said the pope. "Do we visit him where he is to be found, namely in the poor manglers of our world? For that is where he is present."

Francis then recalled the example of [St. Oscar Romero](#), a fierce advocate of the poor, whose social activism as Archbishop of San

Salvador, El Salvador, led to his assassination in 1980.

"As a saintly bishop once said, "The church supports and blesses efforts to change the structures of injustice, and sets down but one condition: that social, economic and political change truly benefit the poor,"" said Francis, citing a speech delivered by Romero less than three months before he was murdered while celebrating Mass.

During his homily, the pope said that the manger — typically used as a trough for feeding animals — can also be reminiscent of those in the world who "hunger for wealth and power, consume even their neighbors, their brothers and sisters."

"How many wars have we seen! And in how many places, even today, are human dignity and freedom treated with contempt!," he lamented. "As always, the principal victims of this human greed are the weak and the vulnerable."

"This Christmas too, as in the case of Jesus, a world ravenous for money, power and pleasure does not make room for the little ones, for so many unborn, poor and forgotten children," Francis continued. "I think above all of the children devoured by war, poverty and injustice. Yet those are the very places to which Jesus comes, a child in the manger of rejection and refusal."

The pope said that all those that surrounded the Christ child in the lowly manger — Mary, Joseph and the shepherds — were all poor and united not by riches nor great expectations, but in their affection for Jesus.

"The poverty of the manger thus shows us where the true riches in life are to be found: not in money and power, but in relationships and persons," he said.

In the same manner that Christ was born in the unexpected and unseemly setting of a manger, the Christmas message serves to remind the entire world that Christ is present even in the most unlikely and most difficult of circumstances, the pope said.

"God was born in a manger so that you could be reborn in the very place where you thought you had hit rock bottom," said Francis. "There is no evil, there is no sin, from which Jesus does not want to save you. And he can. Christmas means that God is close to us: Let confidence be reborn!"

In Christmas message, Pope Francis laments 'famine of peace' fueled by Ukraine war

Francis said food should be used solely as an 'instrument of peace'

[VATICAN](#)
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Pope Francis greets the crowd as he arrives to deliver his Christmas message and his blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city and the world) from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 25, 2022. (CNS/Paul Haring)



BY CHRISTOPHER WHITE

Vatican Correspondent

Rome — 25 December 2022

During his annual Christmas Day message, Pope Francis lamented the "famine of peace" sparked by the invasion of Ukraine, saying the 10 month-long war had wreaked havoc on Ukrainians and fueled a crisis of hunger around the globe.

"Think of all those, especially children, who go hungry, while huge amounts of food daily go to waste and resources are being spent on weapons," said Francis, as he delivered his Dec. 25 *urbi et orbi* ("to the city and the world") message and blessing. "The war in Ukraine has further aggravated this situation, putting entire peoples at risk of famine."

"We know that every war causes hunger and exploits food as a weapon, hindering its distribution to people already suffering," the pope continued. "On this day, let us learn from the Prince of Peace and, starting with those who hold political responsibilities, commit ourselves to making food solely an instrument of peace."

Francis used the occasion to again call for an immediate end to "this senseless war" and deplored the fact that many Ukrainians are spending Christmas in the dark and cold and away from their homes. As the pope delivered his remarks, all of Ukraine was [under alert](#), following Russia's launch of new rockets aimed at the country.

The pope delivered his traditional Christmas Day address from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica overlooking the square

below, where thousands of pilgrims gathered on an unusually warm and sun-filled Christmas morning at the Vatican.

As he did during his [Christmas Eve Mass](#) on Dec. 24, the pope urged "concrete gestures" to aid all who are suffering during the holiday season.

He also used his noontime remarks to highlight a number of conflict zones around the world, including Yemen, Syria, Myanmar, Iran, the Sahel region of Africa, as well as the ongoing disputes between Israelis and Palestinians.

Francis also prayed for the deteriorating situation in Lebanon, which is currently without a government, and called for the support of the international community to help the country rebound.

"I think in particular of the people of Haiti who have been suffering for a long time," Francis said, paying tribute to a country long plagued by natural disasters and humanitarian crises, which in recent months has experienced a new wave of political chaos.

As is his custom, the pope also spotlighted the needs of migrants and refugees, as well as offered prayers for prisoners "whom we regard solely for the mistakes they have made and not as our fellow men and women."

Francis said that the same forces that prevented King Herod from welcoming the birth of Jesus — "attachment to power and money, pride, hypocrisy, falsehood" — continue to plague society today and risk overshadowing the "grace of Christmas."

"Indeed, we must acknowledge with sorrow that, even as the Prince of Peace is given to

us, the icy winds of war continue to buffet humanity," said the pope.

"Let us allow ourselves to be deeply moved by the love of God," Francis concluded. "And let us follow Jesus, who stripped himself of his glory in order to give us a share in his fullness."

Conservatives can win the debate over Vatican II only by ignoring history



Bishops are pictured in a file photo during a Second Vatican Council session inside St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. (CNS file photo)



THOMAS REESE
RELIGION NEWS SERVICE

27 December 2022

With the passage of 60 years since the opening of the Second Vatican Council, there are few people alive who remember the event, even fewer who participated. The council, comprising all the Catholic bishops of the world and called by Pope

John XXIII, began October 11, 1962, and closed December 8, 1965, by which time Pope Paul VI had succeeded John.

The last American bishop to attend the council, Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen, died four years ago at the age of 96. Pope Benedict XVI, who is 95, served as an expert as a young priest in his 30s.

The distance from the council has allowed for different interpretations of the event.

The far right asserts that the council was a mistake; it destroyed the church by abandoning dogma and putting the Mass into the vernacular. They argue that the church should demand strict observance of its moral teaching (although they, too, ignore the demands of the church's social teaching).

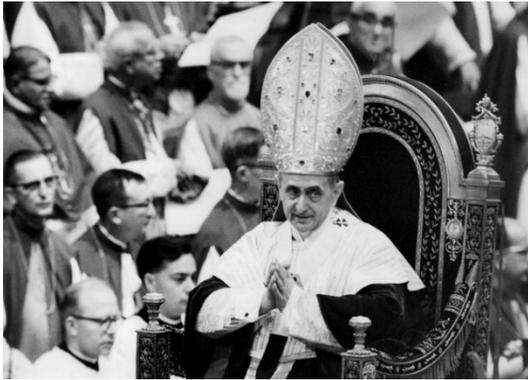
The left argues that the council did not go far enough in its stated purpose: updating the church for the modern world. The council was a good beginning, these critics say, but more needs to be done — allowing women priests, for example, and allowing all priests to marry. They also prioritize the church's social teaching over the church's teaching about sex.

Not many Catholics are on the far right. Those who want to return to the Latin Mass are few but vocal. Public opinion polls show there is support for ordaining women and married persons, and less support for the church's sexual ethics or its social teaching.

Among church elites, however, the major debates in the last 55 years have been over the interpretation of the [documents of Vatican II](#). Conservatives stressed the council's continuity with the past, while liberals stressed how the council had changed the church.

What confused anyone who followed these debates was the ability of either side to find passages in the council documents that supported their positions.

The source of this confusion goes back to Pope Paul VI's desire to have the council documents approved by consensus. A majority vote was not sufficient; not even a two-thirds vote would do. He wanted near unanimity.



Pope Paul VI makes his way past bishops during a session of the Second Vatican Council in 1964. (CNS file photo)

To reach consensus, Paul demanded that the council placate its conservative minority. This meant that controversial issues were described with ambiguous language that was open to different interpretations. Sometimes one paragraph would contradict another. And some issues, such as birth control, were simply taken off the table.

Progressives accepted these compromises because they thought the future belonged to them. But when John Paul II was elected, he took a conservative line on many of these ambiguous passages.

Believing that the post-Vatican II church was in chaos, John Paul pushed for stability. Further change was not going to happen under his watch. He brought Joseph Ratzinger, later Benedict XVI, to the Vatican to make sure that their interpretation

of Vatican II was the only acceptable interpretation in the church. Theologians and priests who did not accept it were fired from seminaries and removed from chanceries. Supporters, meanwhile, became bishops.

Conservatives can win the debate over Vatican II only by ignoring history. They approach the council's documents like biblical fundamentalists who read Scripture without understanding the historical and cultural context of the passage. They are like judicial textualists who simply look at the words in the law without respecting the intention of the legislators.

For conservatives, it is sufficient to quote the council text and the interpretation given to it by John Paul and Benedict. End of discussion.

Conservatives have tried to confine the council to a textual analysis, but that misses what the council meant to the participants and to those who, like myself, have lived in the pre- and post-Vatican II church.

For those wishing to understand the council, there is no better place to start than [What Happened at Vatican II](#), by the Jesuit historian Fr. John W. O'Malley. Here you will find a well-researched and readable account of the council.

In that book is what [Jesuit Fr. James Martin](#), the editor at large for "America," calls the single best short paragraph on how the Second Vatican Council changed the church:

from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from definition to mystery, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to dialogue, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility

to friendship, from rivalry to partnership, from suspicion to trust, from static to ongoing, from passive acceptances to active engagement, from fault-finding to appreciation, from prescriptive to principles, from behavior modification to inner appropriation.

Conservatives have tried to confine the council to a textual analysis, but that misses what the council meant to the participants and to those who, like myself, have lived in the pre- and post-Vatican II church. It was a revolution that opened our eyes to what the church could be if we dared.

Pope Francis says retired Pope Benedict XVI is 'very sick'

[VATICAN](#)
[VATICAN NEWS](#)



Pope Francis greets retired Pope Benedict XVI at the Mater Ecclesiae monastery after a consistory for the creation of 20 new cardinals in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Aug. 27, 2022. Looking on is Archbishop Georg Gänswein, the retired pope's private secretary. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



BY CHRISTOPHER WHITE

Vatican Correspondent

Rome — 28 December 2022

Pope Francis on Dec. 28 asked for prayers for retired Pope Benedict XVI, saying he is "very sick."

The pope's request came during his weekly general audience, where he added that the 95-year-old supports the church "in silence."

Francis went on to "ask the Lord to console him and support him in this testimony of love for the church until the end."

Benedict XVI was elected pope on April 19, 2005 until he resigned on February 28, 2013, becoming the first pope to voluntarily abdicate the papacy in nearly 600 years. Since then, he has lived in the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery inside the Vatican, where he has been largely withdrawn from public life.

Following the pope's request for prayers, a Vatican statement said the retired pope's conditions had been aggravated in "the last few hours" due to his advanced age.

"The situation at the moment remains under control, constantly followed by doctors," it said.

The statement also noted that following the Wednesday audience, Francis visited Benedict XVI at the retired pope's residence.

Confront gun violence for the sake of our children, the Holy Innocents

[NEWS](#)
[SOCIAL JUSTICE](#)



A mourner stops to pay his respects at a memorial at Robb Elementary School June 9 in Uvalde, Texas. The memorial was created to honor the two teachers and 19 students killed in a mass shooting at the school on May 24. (AP/Eric Gay, File)



BY BEVERLY ANNE LOGRASSO
28 December 2022

From my days as a Catholic elementary school student, I recall the face of the beautiful child with blonde curls on our Catholic calendar marking the feast day of the Holy Innocents on Dec. 28.

Ursuline Sister Mary Robert, my third-grade teacher, told us that Holy Innocents was a feast day to remind us that God especially loved children. Since A.D. 485, Holy Innocents has been marked as an official feast day in the Western church to celebrate

the children who were the first martyrs, killed by King Herod — who was known for his paranoia and cruelty.

When I entered the Cleveland Ursuline novitiate in 1965, we looked forward to Holy Innocents as the feast day we were "allowed" to roller skate on the loading dock, which had smooth cement flooring!

As a John Carroll University graduate student, I became familiar with Raymond Brown's book [*The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*](#). Brown discusses the complexity of determining the historicity of these infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke. He explains that the authors used the narratives to convey a religious, rather than historical message regarding Jesus' identity and how the early life of Jesus echoed the history of Israel.

However, Herod, king of Judea, is an authenticated [historical figure](#), ruler, and builder of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Herod was known as a cruel and vindictive leader who killed his own family members. In today's parlance, Herod might be called a "shooter."

Now, as I frequently drive the road to our Ursuline motherhouse, I pass Lander Elementary School in Mayfield Heights, Ohio. From May 24 through the end of June of this year, the school walkway in front of the building had 21 chairs set up in a row with photos of 19 children and two teachers [killed by guns](#) in Uvalde, Texas. I could not ignore the photos; the faces of the children were a constant, unrelenting, "in your face" testament to the plague of gun violence in our country.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center website, there are currently [733 hate groups](#) operating in the United States. Also

check the [Gun Violence Archive](#), based in Washington, D.C. It listed the following U.S. statistics for 2022, as of Dec. 22:

- Gun violence deaths, all causes — 43,114;
- Homicide — 19,618;
- Suicide — 23,496;
- Mass shootings — 636;
- Mass murders — 36;
- Number of children killed, ages 0-11 — 305;
- Number of teens killed, ages 12-17 — 1,313;
- Police officers killed — 68.

As part of our Christmas celebration, we may be able to find the time to confront gun violence by following one suggestion from the [Center for American Progress](#), a nonpartisan policy institute that deals with social justice issues in the United States, which suggests the following:

- Talk to young people in your family, school, neighborhood about gun violence and mental health;
- Support concealed carry requirements in your state;
- Vote for sensible gun laws;
- Reduce firearm access to youth and at-risk individuals;
- Hold the gun industry accountable for gun sale oversight;
- Engage gun owners and dealers in solution discussions;
- Require safe and secure gun storage;
- Recognize gun violence as a public health problem;
- Involve teens in local community safety plans;
- Support mental health funding and services;
- Teach conflict resolution strategies.

When we hear the Christmas songs on YouTube, radio and TV — songs like

"[Christmas Was Meant for Children](#)" — let the songs remind us that it is up to us to reduce the level of gun violence in our countries, for the sake of our children, the Holy Innocents.

Do your part to end gun violence!

Contact your congressperson about your concern.

Get information from organizations/websites like:

- [Everytown for Gun Safety](#);
- [Sandy Hook Promise](#);
- [Giffords](#) (an organization founded by former Arizona Rep. Gabby Giffords, who was shot while in office);
- [Coalition to Stop Gun Violence](#);
- [Brady: United Against Gun Violence](#);
- [Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence](#).

Or find out about the organizations like that in your country that deal with suffering inflicted on the innocent. Child marriage? Child labor or trafficking? Female genital mutilation? This is a good season to remember all our Holy Innocents!

**Holy Names
University in
California will close
in May after 154
years**
[NEWS](#)



Jamila Griffith, left, calls a student for an appointment in the financial aid office at Holy Names University in Oakland, Calif., Aug. 17, 2007. University officials announced Dec. 19, 2022, that the school will close in May 2023 after educating students for 154 years. (CNS/Greg Tarczynski)

BY CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE
Oakland, Calif. — 27 December
2022

Citing rising operating costs, declining enrollment and an increased need for institutional aid, officials at Holy Names University in Oakland said the school will close at the end of the academic year in May.

Efforts to partner with another institution to keep the 154-year-old university open were unsuccessful, said Steven Borg, chairman of the school's board of trustees.

The school was founded by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary.

"While we've had interest in long-term collaboration with potential partners, we do not have the type of interest that would sustain HNU in continuing to offer its own programs and services, so we are forced to make the difficult decision to close and designate a transfer institution in the best interest of our students," Borg said in a Dec. 19 news release.

The university said "both COVID-19 and an economic downturn disproportionately impacted" its students.

Enrollment stood at 520 undergraduates and 423 graduate students during the fall semester. Meanwhile, a total of 449 students total are registered for the spring semester that starts in January, the school reported.

The university said it had formalized an agreement with Dominican University of California in San Rafael, north of San Francisco, to transfer academic programs after the spring semester pending approval from the appropriate accreditation agency.

"First and foremost, ensuring HNU students will be able to continue their academic path forward is our top priority. We are also doing everything in our power to support our faculty and staff during this period of uncertainty," Borg said.

Dominican University officials have pledged to consider Holy Names faculty and staff for similar positions.

Dominican University President Nicola Pitchford said the mission and degree offerings of the two institutions "are beautifully aligned" and that the student populations are similar.

"Dominican has demonstrated supporting students of all backgrounds, so we know we are well prepared to help Holy Names students thrive. We look forward to inviting Holy Names University continuing students to a new, vibrant and inclusive home in San Rafael," Pitchford said in a statement.

Six members of the Sisters of the Holy Names, a teaching order from Quebec, founded the university in 1868. The school originally was located on the shores of Lake Merritt in Oakland before moving to its

current location in the Oakland Hills in 1957.

The religious congregation said it was saddened by the closing, a step described as "a painful moment for us all."

In a statement, the order said it was "immensely proud of the 154-year history and legacy" of the university.

"Our hearts and prayers are with current HNU students, faculty, staff, alumni, and all who are part of this beloved institution," the sisters said.

The congregation also thanks the board of trustees for doing all that was possible to ensure that the university remained open.

"We know that they have worked tirelessly and with the highest integrity, loyalty, expertise and commitment to the HNU mission," the Sisters of the Holy Names added.

Bishop Michael C. Barber of Oakland also expressed sadness over the closing and credited the Sisters of the Holy Names for their commitment to higher education.

"This unfortunate situation is occurring at small colleges throughout the United States. I fully support the actions of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, the HNU board, its chair and president, who have kept me and my advisers apprised of the difficult situation they face," he said in a statement.

Borg said the rising cost to attend college had "become a challenge for many students and their families." Despite providing "significant institutional aid" to students, the school remained dependent on tuition and residence hall revenue to continue operating, he explained.

The board of trustees decided in November 2021 to seek a merger with another institution, but such talks were unsuccessful, Borg said. Complicating factors included a \$49 million debt on the school's property and the cost of deferred maintenance on a 65-year-old campus, estimated to be as much as \$200 million, he said.

"The financial situation of the university changed dramatically this fall. It was a herculean effort to find a path to the spring semester and allow HNU an orderly end. This included the procurement of additional financial resources and collaboration with Dominican," Borg said.

The school "continues to face "some hurdles" and must finalize agreements "to solidify the pathway to May 2023 graduation and close," he added without elaboration.

Retired pope's ailing health raises questions of what's next

[VATICAN](#)
[VATICAN NEWS](#)



Pope Francis, left, embraces Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, at the Vatican, June 28, 2017. Francis on Wednesday, Dec. 28, 2022, said his predecessor, Benedict XVI, is "very sick," and he asked the faithful to pray for the retired

pontiff so God will comfort him “to the very end.” (L'Osservatore Romano/Pool Photo via AP, File)

NICOLE WINFIELD ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rome — 28 December 2022

The Vatican has detailed rituals and procedures to follow when a pope dies, but it has not published such rules for a pope emeritus. As a result, official word on December 28 that the health of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI had worsened prompted questions about what happens if and when he dies.

The answer is: There is no specific answer, at least not one the Vatican has announced ahead of time. The only thing certain is that the most important ritual following the death of a pope -- a conclave to elect a new one -- does not apply.

Francis sounded the alarm about the 95-year-old Benedict's health when he asked during his weekly Wednesday general audience for a special prayer for his predecessor, saying the retired pope was “very sick.”

Francis later visited Benedict at his home in Vatican City, the Vatican Gardens. The Vatican spokesman confirmed that Benedict had experienced a worsening in his condition, due to his age, in the previous few hours but said the situation was under control.

Most church watchers assume that, when they become necessary, funeral rituals for Benedict will closely hew to those for a retired bishop of Rome: a funeral in either St. Peter's Basilica or the piazza, in this case presided over by Francis rather than the dean of the College of Cardinals, and burial in the grotto underneath the basilica.

“The funeral for a pope emeritus is the funeral for the bishop emeritus of Rome,” church historian Alberto Melloni said, adding that the situation isn't entirely unprecedented since dioceses around the world have resolved how to properly honor retired bishops.

The rites themselves are contained in the tome “Roman Rituale,” which lays out how liturgical rites are to be celebrated, with specific prayers and readings.

A few tweaks are called for, however: Because Benedict was a head of state, the funeral would presumably take on greater pomp with the attendance of official delegations from around the world. To give them time to arrive, and to honor Benedict's former status as pope, he would likely lie in state for a period of days in the basilica before the funeral, as occurred for popes past.

Few can forget the long lines of pilgrims who queued up for days and nights to pay homage to St. John Paul II when he died in 2005.

One thing that would distinguish a funeral for Benedict from that of the reigning pope is the nine days of funeral rites before burial, called the “novendiales,” presumably would not take place, Melloni said. But one tradition that would be retained is the placing on the casket of the book of the Gospels.

When Benedict announced his retirement in 2013, he opened a decade of uncharted pontifical territory. From his title, “pope emeritus,” to his decision to retain the white cassock of the papacy, Benedict largely created a new playbook to encompass both a reigning and a retired pope.

Christopher Bellitto, a history professor at Kean University in New Jersey, said the novelty of Benedict's remarkable decision would likely carry over into the posthumous period, and beyond.

"Headlines will say 'One pope is burying another.' Not true," Bellitto said in an email. "To be clear: Benedict is the former pope."

"But it is an extraordinary sight since we haven't had a papal resignation in 600 years. It speaks both to the continuity of papal tradition in the line of St. Peter but also to a new world where papal resignations will be less rare, maybe even common," he said.

Jesus' birth is not 'fairy tale,' but call to live the Gospel, pope says

[VATICAN](#)



Pope Francis waves to visitors and pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican for the recitation of the Angelus prayer Dec. 26, the feast of St. Stephen. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

CINDY WOODEN CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Vatican City — 27 December 2022

The day after Christmas the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, which emphasizes how the story of Jesus' birth is not a "fairy tale," but a call to live as witnesses of the Gospel, Pope Francis said.

Marking the feast Dec. 26, a public holiday in Italy, Pope Francis led the recitation of the Angelus prayer at noon with thousands of visitors and pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square.

By putting the martyrdom of St. Stephen on the calendar the day after Christmas, he said, "the liturgy really seems to want to steer us away from the world of lights, lunches and gifts in which we might indulge somewhat in these days."

The point, he said, is that "Christmas is not the fairy tale of the birth of a king, but it is the coming of the Savior, who frees us from evil by taking upon himself our evil: selfishness, sin, death."

The Bible says St. Stephen was a deacon, the pope said, which "means that his first witness was not given in words, but through the love with which he served those most in need."

At the same time, the Acts of the Apostles describes how Stephen spoke of Jesus to those he met, sharing with them the faith.

"However, his greatest testimony is yet another: that he knew how to unite charity and proclamation," the pope said, by "following the example of Jesus" and forgiving those who were about to kill him.

St. Stephen shows that "we can improve our witness through charity toward our brothers

and sisters, faithfulness to God's word and forgiveness," the pope said. "It is forgiveness that tells whether we really practice charity toward others and live the word of Jesus."

Over the holidays, when many people are spending time with family and friends, there may be "someone with whom we have not gotten along, who has hurt us, with whom we have never mended the relationship," the pope said. "Let us ask the newborn Jesus for the newness of a heart that can forgive: We all need a forgiving heart!"

Pope Francis also used the occasion once again to wish people peace — "peace in families, peace in parishes and religious communities, peace in movements and associations, peace for those peoples tormented by war, peace for the dear and embattled Ukraine."

Noting that many people in the crowd held Ukrainian flags, the pope again said, "Let us ask for peace for this suffering people!"