

# Greetings of Peace

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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

**R**espected Hosts here at the Centro Mariapoli in Castel Gandolfo; Your Eminence, Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs; Fr. Jesús Morán Cepedano, Co-President of the Focolare Movement; Prof. Donald Mitchell, organizer of the conference; and Ms. Paola Baratto and Mr. Roberto Catalano, the gracious Conference Coordinators for this dialogue; distinguished scholars; ladies and gentlemen from both the Buddhist and Catholic traditions. On behalf of my brother bishops on the Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), please accept my warmest greeting of peace!

Dear friends, this year marks an important milestone in the history of the Catholic Church, namely, the fiftieth anniversary

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Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture, Vol. 4, No. 2 (October 2015)  
9–10 © 2015

of the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, which, for the first time in the history of the Church, witnessed the clear exhortation for all Catholics to embark boldly yet humbly on a robust course of intentional dialogue with the followers of other religious families. This ground-breaking document, which—*without exaggeration*—serves as the Church's *Magna Carta* for interreligious dialogue, has truly been a galvanizing point of creative encounter with members of the world's religious families; an encounter that not only links Catholics with all people of goodwill in the common pursuit of mutual understanding and esteem, the promotion of human dignity and well-being, the virtues of justice and peace, but also—let us not forget!—has served to unite us in the common search for answers to the existential questions of meaning and purpose that have accompanied humanity from the foundation of history, questions, moreover, that have always moved our fellow humans to seek out the presence and support of religious leaders and representatives of religious traditions as *Nostra Aetate* makes plain in its opening chapter:

The world expects from (us), that is, the various religions, answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of all people: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?

And so, dear friends, when we gather let us strive in the first place to meet one another in a spirit of peace and mutual esteem even as we endeavor together to attain greater understanding of one another's tradition; *but also*, even as we strive for greater mutual understanding, let us endeavor to bring the light that comes with understanding to bear especially on the concrete places of suffering present in varying degrees in all human beings. For, while the great questions that our fellow human beings ask through the millennia require our attention and the wisdom that our spiritual traditions bring, so too, and perhaps now more than ever, do our fellow human beings require our concrete presence and participation in their lives as we are called, each in his own way, to live the central virtues of our traditions in their midst: I am thinking especially here of the Buddhist emphasis on *compassion*, and, as Pope Francis reminds the world constantly, both in word and deed, the virtue of *mercy*.

The occasion of this meeting, with its topic, "suffering, liberation, and fraternity," is an opportunity for us to address together the causes of relational suffering that afflict our brothers and sisters, such as poverty, disease, and violence. Therefore, this encounter is historic in that it brings together Buddhist and Catholic leaders in both dialogue and social action from all across the United States to discuss relational ills and the social problems they cause. It will also take you forward when you return to the United States to work together to *heal* and *reconcile* our broken world as brothers and sisters in the spirit of fraternity. Indeed, my friends, there is so much suffering and so little fraternity in this world that one might be tempted to despair at the increasing shadows that seem to threaten the very things this meeting will discuss: that is, precisely, fraternity and human liberation—virtues that are so dear

in both our traditions! And so, this gathering of Buddhist and Catholic leaders presents itself as a ray of hope and light for those who live in darkness and know only suffering.

As some of you will recall, the USCCB's Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs in the past has coordinated Buddhist-Catholic retreats—here I am reminded of the first encounters between us at the Serra Retreat Center in Malibu that were followed by annual meetings in the San Francisco area from 2003 to 2008. Sadly, given the financial crisis of 2008–2009, which severely curtailed our resources and limited the scope of our dialogues, we were required to scale back on our portfolio of dialogues, which ultimately curtailed our ability to sustain the Buddhist-Catholic dialogue. Nevertheless, I understand that this meeting at Castel Gandolfo serves as the inauguration of a new kind of dialogue, called by Pope Francis the "Dialogue of Fraternity," that will continue in the United States under the auspices of regional Buddhist communities and Catholic Archdioceses—specifically, in the Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Washington, DC regions. This news is good indeed, and I heartily thank and encourage those among you who have shepherded this process into being and extend to you the support of the bishops' committee!

With the presence of our director for interreligious dialogue, Dr. Anthony Cirelli, the bishops of the committee that I chair for the USCCB offer our encouragement and look forward to receiving news of how you will address the needs of our brothers and sisters as you collaborate and organize to bring to those in our communities who are suffering the blessed hope for liberation and the ineffable joy of fraternity!