

“FRATERNITY IS THE FOUNDATION AND PATHWAY OF PEACE.”

Message of His Holiness Francis for the celebration of the World Day of Peace 2014

(The Holy Father's birthday is on 17 December, pray for peace could be a magnificent present for Pope Francis!)

COME QUICKLY, LORD. COME, O SAVIOUR! GRANT US PEACE

NOVENA FOR PEACE IN CENTRAL AFRICA

PONTIFICAL FOUNDATION AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED

17th December – 25th December 2013



The short prayers for the days from 17 to 23 December – the first five days of the novena – are taken from the Liturgy for those days, and they consist of the ancient and well-known **‘O’ Antiphons of Advent** – a cry of longing to the saviour of all peoples and nations, the Liberator from all oppression and enslavement, from hatred, from death, awaited throughout all generations and the bearer of true freedom and peace. We share some of the great **testimonies of suffering and faith** that have reached us in recent days from the Central African Republic. And finally, we place our petition, our cry for PEACE into the hands of our Blessed Mother **Mary, our Refuge and Hope**, with a prayer that is full of confident trust that she will not fail to hear our supplication, or that of all our brothers and sisters of the Central African Republic: the **Memorare**

Introduction to the Novena for peace in Central Africa

The present introduction is a homage to the priests, the men and women in religious orders and to so many laypersons who have taken in hundreds of thousands especially in Bangui in these days, in parishes, in order to protect them, care for them, help them, grieve with them and pray with them to sow peace and hope.

Thursday, 5 December: A day without peace in Bangui, the capital. I would say it was almost an apocalyptic day with dozens of deaths. I saw some of these examples of "collateral damage" who had collapsed in the street in a grotesque fashion. Where did peace hide itself in this country? Evening is falling on this country with four and a half million inhabitants. Christmas is coming. Will it be a Christmas with cribs and carols, or one with Herod, machetes and the presidential guard? I stood on the lawn of the Bangui middle seminary and observed the 5,000 people who huddles across the meadow, the veranda and the football pitch. They even occupied the church. There came whole families, women with enormous bundles on their heads, young pregnant women with children on their backs, groups of infants with bundles as baggage. Their hearts were pumping adrenalin and were constricted by fear. Fear is the opposite of peace. Together with mistrust and suspicion this fear is the seed of hatred, which in turn is also the opposite of peace. I went to a woman who was weeping and was slowly letting the rosary beads pass through her fingers. Together with her husband Jean Bosco she is responsible for the 40 children and young people from the San Pablo orphanage, three stone throws from here. She was thinking about her empty house with all their belongings which could be looted tonight. With the rosary beads of phosphorescent plastic she wanted to prevent a possible violation of her privacy. The rosary is an appeal for peace. I told her she should repeat like the Mother of God: "Do whatever he tells you," so as to charge the batteries of her hope. Hope leads to peace. Central Africa must leave its past behind, look for peace and live in peace. She answered that she was just praying to fill her heart with a drop of hope, with the first drop for her empty glass. I said to her that when hope is lost, there is still the hope that you will regain hope, which is the twin of prayer. She asked me to pray for her and her children, and also for her husband. They want to form a prayer chain on the meadow tonight to ask God for peace. As I made the sign of the cross on her forehead I promised her my prayer. I also said to her that I would ask others to pray for her. A prayer chain, called **a novena of prayers** in other countries, for peace to return to Central Africa. After 35 years in Africa I know from personal experience that the power of prayer can cause hatred to melt. Hatred makes people bitter. Peace makes life sweet. To forgive without further ado loosens all knots. Unconditional forgiveness cancels out the bitterness and sadness between people.

On the television scenes are still shown with young people looting and committing acts of violence. A people cannot nourish the seed of hatred in its heart for a whole life. A district, a family cannot live for ever with mistrust and suspicion and divide its neighbours into friends or enemies, Muslims or people of a different faith. You can't live for years with the lump of hatred in your throat, with a knot of anger in your belly.

Central Africa has lived for ten years in a state of "coup d'état", ten years of unrest and attacks on power, ten years of the smell of gunpowder in a final stage, ten years of growth without any real development, life in the midst of death.

Before Christmas the international Catholic pastoral charity "Aid to the Church in Need" wishes to hold a novena of prayers for peace in Central Africa. I join with you in my heart. That's what I promised the woman with the phosphorescent rosary. She is the image of the Central African people, who have hit rock bottom in their poverty. But this Central African woman, mother, sister or wife, is the only one who can inject a trace of level-headedness into the hearts of those who sow the seed of hatred instead of stars of peace.

For Aid to the Church in Need, 11.12.2013

+ Juan José Aguirre, Bishop of Bangassou



DECEMBER 17TH - FIRST DAY: FOR THE REFUGEES, FOR THE 600,000 INTERNALLY DISPLACED AND THE 80,000 CENTRAL AFRICANS WHO HAVE BEEN FORCED TO FLEE TO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

„O Wisdom, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner. O come to teach us the way of truth“

COME QUICKLY, LORD. COME, O SAVIOUR!
GRANT US PEACE

“Christians in the Archdiocese of Bangui went to sleep last night planning to get up today to join the diocesan pilgrimage to the Marian sanctuary at Ngukomba, some 24 kilometers (14 miles) from Bangui, on the Damara route. It turned out very differently. The firing of weapons of war woke up all of Bangui. There were reports of clashes between armed groups: one the one hand fighters belonging to anti-balaka forces, and, on the other hand, Seleka forces. Some residents caught between warring parties stayed holed up at home; others found refuge in churches and with religious communities. By mid-morning, the parishes of St. John of Galabadjia and Bangui’s Cathedral of Our Lady the Immaculate had taken in some 1,000 people; St. Peter of Gobongo about 2,500; St. Bernard more than 3,000; Our Lady of Africa more than 3,500; and St. Paul of the Rapids more than 5,000. The stream of people seeking shelter continued to grow in the afternoon, doubling in size, with their number tripling by nightfall. Church facilities also took in the wounded who have been without medical care until now.”

Letter P. Dieu-Béni Mganga, 5th December, Archidiócesis de Bangui



Photo: “Help your people, Oh Lord! Bring your peace and harmony to the people clamoring for your help”.

REMEMBER, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

Amen.

DECEMBER 18TH - SECOND DAY: FOR THE PASTORS AND THE FAITHFUL; FOR THE LIVING STONES OF THE CHURCH

"O Adonai and leader of Israel, you appeared to Moses in a burning bush and you gave him the Law on Sinai. O come and save us with your mighty power"

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"Sunday Masses were celebrated in the parishes only in the morning, as holding Masses at night was impossible given the continued security threats. Attendance at the liturgies varied from church to church, but overall there was a decline. Father Iréné Fernand, vicar of the Church of Our Lady of Africa commented: **"Ah, my friends, this was the first time in my life that I said Mass for just nine faithful in a parish that often attracts 3,000 faithful on Sundays. 'There where one or two are gathered in my name, Jesus says, I am in their midst.' Christ was with us and still is with us."** The parish served by this pastor was subject to repeated threats by the seleva to the point of exasperating him and prompting him to say: 'Ah, those Seleva! They came to the parish of Our Lady of Africa at 11.30, the third time in two days. The result : a pick-up truck was stolen and three cars were damaged. ... Thanks to the intervention of a parishioner and French troops, they were not able to take off with the other cars.'

These men without scruples! They have no respect, not even for the sacred ... All the parishes prayed for peace in the Central African Republic. **One thing is certain: God will not remain silent in the face of all these prayers offered him by these men and women for the intention of the Central African Republic. "**

Letter P. Dieu-Béni Mganga, 8th December, Archidiócesis de Bangui



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Amen.

DECEMBER 19TH - THIRD DAY: FOR THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN, FOR THE WIDOWS AND THE ORPHANS, FOR THE HELPLESS AND THE SICK

“O stock of Jesse, you stand as a signal for the nations; kings fall silent before you whom the peoples acclaim. O come to deliver us, and do not delay.”

**COME QUICKLY, LORD. COME, O SAVIOUR!
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FOTO: “Women are far braver than men: one of them spoke. Selekas killed her husband last Friday, **she's got 7 small kids and nothing left**. This testimony made many of us cries”.

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Amen.

20TH DECEMBER - FOURTH DAY: FOR AN END TO THE VIOLENCE AND THE LAYING DOWN OF ARMS

“O key of David and scepter of Israel, what you open no one else can close again; what you close no one can open. O come to lead the captive from prison; free those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death”

COME QUICKLY, LORD. COME, O SAVIOUR!

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“Many conflicts are taking place amid general indifference. To all those who live in lands where weapons impose terror and destruction, I assure you of my personal closeness and that of the whole Church, whose mission is to bring Christ’s love to the defenceless victims of forgotten wars through her prayers for peace, her service to the wounded, the starving, refugees, the displaced and all those who live in fear. The Church also speaks out in order to make leaders hear the cry of pain of the suffering and to put an end to every form of hostility, abuse and the violation of fundamental human rights.

Nevertheless, as long as so great a quantity of arms are in circulation as at present, new pretexts can always be found for initiating hostilities. For this reason, **I make my own the appeal of my predecessors for the non-proliferation of arms and for disarmament of all parties.**”

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Amen.

DECEMBER 21ST - FIFTH DAY: FOR ALL THE VICTIMS, FOR ALL WHO HAVE DIED; FOR ALL WHO HAVE LOST THEIR LOVED ONES

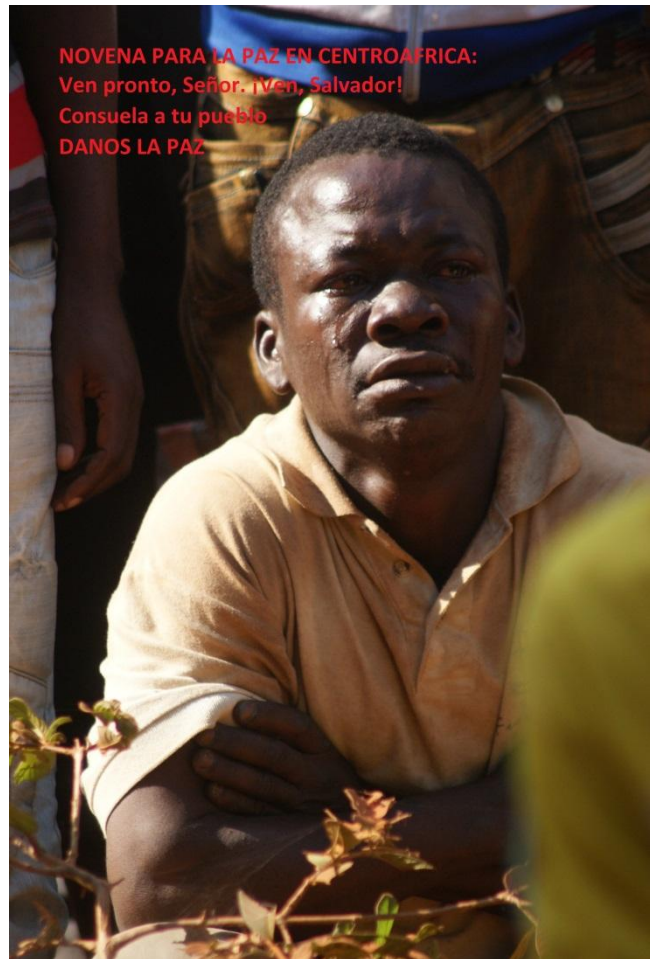
“O Rising Sun, you are the splendor of eternal light and the sun of justice. O come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death”.

COME QUICKLY, LORD. COME, O SAVIOUR!

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“Seeing all these atrocities and the cold-bloodedness of those committing them with impunity, one has the right to question the humanity of those faithless and lawless oppressors of the peaceful people of the Central African Republic. Seeing how they have no respect for the living or the dead, it makes one wonder if human life has any value in their eyes. We have heard of older people [who have been victims], whom a humane person must respect, be he or she living or dead. More than the living, the dead deserve respect and honor. Death? Now that is celebrated. Asked about the reasons for all the strewn across the roadways and streets of the capital, the Red Cross responds: No safe passage permitting the movement of aid workers, no vehicle to transport staff or to move the dead and burial for most of the victims takes place by the side of roadways or streets at the spot where they are found. This has some grave consequences: Parents consider their loved ones missing while in fact they

are dead and already buried, Families are unable to honor some of their dead because they do not know the date of their passing, nor the place of their burial...”



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Amen.

DECEMBER 22ND - SIXTH DAY: FOR THE POLITICIANS – THAT THEY MAY NOT FOSTER HATRED BETWEEN THE RELIGIONS

“O King whom all the peoples desire, you are the cornerstone which makes all one. O come and save man whom you made from clay”

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Interreligious meeting in the capital Bangui, on invitation of Archbishop Dieudonne Nzapalainga, 10-11 of June 2013.

“ Turned out that Seleka demand for all refugees to come back home but **there's no guarantee. The problem is not the Muslims. They, the Selekas, are the killers.** They are the ones who throw dead bodies in the river, who even took it up on me and the Red Cross because we went looking for them. Seleka arrests and tortures people,

Seleka threatens. It's the Seleka that beats up people and steals from them, Seleka who places barriers illegally with the excuse of protecting: the truth is that they to exact a tribute from everybody. Their only interest is to protect their own pockets. They forced people to flee, made them escape here and since August demand all food and supply trucks to pay them a fee. We have no issues with Muslims, nor Pelus. **Our doors were open to anyone in need, we give food to refugees here in the Mission and in the Mosque. Our problem is with you, the Selekas.**”

Testimony of Fr. Aurelio Gazzera, Carmelite missionary in Bozoum

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Amen.

DECEMBER 23RD - SEVENTH DAY: FOR HOPE

“O Emmanuel, you are our king and judge, the One whom the peoples await and their Savior. O come and save us, Lord, our God “

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“The socio-political situation appears to be desperate. Nonetheless, Advent prepares for the celebration of the happy event in human history: God made Himself one of us in His smallness, his humility and his fragility. He lifts us up from our degradation to fill us with His glory. I am confident that this hope for the people of the Central African Republic will not be in vain. The God who stoops down to the poor, the orphan and the widow, will certainly dry the tears in His children’s eyes and bring them His joy”.

**Mons. Nestor-Désiré Nongo-Aziagbia, S.M.A.
Bishop of Bossangoa**



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Amen.

24th DECEMBER - EIGHTH DAY: MARY QUEEN OF PEACE, PRAY FOR US!

“Loving Mother of the Redeemer,
gate of heaven, star of the sea,
assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again.
To the wonderment of nature you bore your Creator,
yet remained a virgin after as before.
You who received Gabriel's joyful greeting,
have pity on us poor sinners.

Alma Redemptoris Mater

“I went to a woman who was weeping and was slowly letting the rosary beads pass through her fingers. Together with her husband Jean Bosco she is responsible for the 40 children and young people from the San Pablo orphanage, three stone throws from here. She was thinking about her empty house with all their belongings which could be looted tonight. With the rosary beads of phosphorescent plastic she wanted to prevent a possible violation of her privacy. The rosary is an appeal for peace. I told her she should repeat like the Mother of God: "Do whatever he tells you," so as to charge the batteries of her hope. Hope leads to peace. Central Africa must leave its past behind, look for peace and live in peace. She answered that she was just praying to fill her heart with a drop of hope, with the first drop for her empty glass. I said to her that when hope is lost, there is still the hope that you will regain hope, which is the twin of prayer.”

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25TH DECEMBER - NINTH AND FINAL DAY: FOR THOSE WHO ARE STRIVING FOR PEACE

«For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**. His authority shall grow continually, and **there shall be endless peace** for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.»

Christmas Eve (Is 9, 2-6)



"I will spend Christmas in a small village that has been half burnt down by the Seleka rebels (400 huts burnt out), with people who have lost everything – house and home, beds and mosquito nets, seeds and clothing, and yet they have not yet lost their fear. I am going to spend Christmas with them, to weep or pray, to encourage them, to feel and to be with them, to recite the mysteries of the Rosary so that peace may enter through the pores of our skin and reach our hearts, and to tell them that tomorrow will be better, that calm will return after the storm, that the Lord and his Passion on Calvary is the key to understanding what is happening to us, the key to this and to all the tribulations of the world. May he continue to be our rock during the times of the "dark night ... "

Mons. Juan José Aguirre, bishop of Bangassou

Christmas: Christ, God becomes man; He is the Messiah who came to save us from evil, from hatred, from death. May this Novena be our support for all our brothers and sisters who by their efforts and dedication are striving so that in the Central African Republic – and in other parts of the world – Christmas may be not merely a commemoration but a reality. God is stronger than death, than hatred and war. This is what they believe. This is the root of their hope and their striving. We also hope that the Central African Republic – a forgotten country that few people know – may become news: because it deserves to be, because it is a country full of beauty and of people who deserve not to be forgotten (Aid to the Church in Need)

