

Migrants and Pilgrims of Hope

HOLY YEAR 2025



Bishop Paolo Martinelli OFM Cap.
Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia



APOSTOLIC VICARIATE
OF SOUTHERN ARABIA
The Catholic Church in UAE, Oman & Yemen



'The Christ Child Distributing Bread to Pilgrims', Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1678),
Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest.

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Letter for the Jubilee 2025



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The beginning of the Jubilee

“*Hope does not disappoint*” (Rom 5:5). With these words of Apostle Paul, begins the Bull of Indiction with which Pope Francis invites us to celebrate the Jubilee of the Lord 2025 and to be pilgrims of hope.

So many things disappoint us in life! But Christ is the rock on which to build our future. He is the anchor of salvation, to hold on to, even in times of tribulation and storm. Let us welcome the invitation of Pope Francis to live with great vigor of the Jubilee of the Lord.

On Christmas eve, the Holy Father has opened the Holy Door in St. Peter’s Basilica, and thus solemnly begun the Holy Year of the Lord 2025. Along with all the dioceses around the world, we too in our Apostolic Vicariate, begun the Jubilee year on the theme, ‘Pilgrims of Hope’, in the Cathedral of Saint Joseph during the vigil mass of Sunday of the Holy Family.

All the parishes of our Apostolic Vicariate, in the UAE, Oman and Yemen, solemnly celebrated the opening of the Jubilee on Epiphany Sunday. In fact, there is a deep connection between Epiphany and the Jubilee that invites us to be pilgrims of hope. The best example comes from the Magi who made pilgrimages with camels and dromedaries from the lands of Arabia to reach Jesus, lying in a cave in Bethlehem. Arriving in Bethlehem they recognized Jesus as the hope of all peoples. We too, imitating the Magi, want to be pilgrims of hope in this Jubilee year.

The Jubilee of the Lord

What is the meaning of this Jubilee of the Lord? First, the purpose of the holy year that the Catholic Church celebrates every 25 years is to remember the incarnation of the Son of God: “*The Word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14). The announcement of Christmas – Emanuel, God with us - expands in this way throughout the jubilee year.

We celebrate an event that happened in time - the birth of Jesus -

which has given direction and meaning to the time itself. Just think about the fact that most nations on earth count the years starting from the Incarnation: we speak of years “before Christ” and “after Christ”, because he has given the direction to the history of humanity. He is the foundation and the fulfillment of the life of all, of the entire universe. He is the first and the last.

Furthermore, why do we call the Holy Year “jubilee”? We are accustomed to use the word jubilee when we have a wedding anniversary or another important event of the past, we generally say silver jubilee or golden jubilee, etc. But the Lord’s jubilee is different from the idea of celebrating other jubilees. The word Jubilee comes from the Old Testament, from the Jewish tradition. The Book of Leviticus (25:10) speaks of a favorable year in which to forgive debts, experience God’s mercy and give everyone the opportunity for a new beginning. Christian tradition takes up this ancient custom, relating it to the birth of Jesus. In this way, every twenty-five years the Church celebrates the ordinary Jubilee of the Lord to intensely experience God’s mercy and are called to share the same mercy with others, giving everyone the opportunity to start anew. We too in this year are called to experience God’s mercy and to be merciful with everyone.

Christian Hope

Pope Francis wanted to make hope as the theme of this Jubilee Year. Without hope we cannot live; we cannot commit ourselves to the future or make the big decisions of life. But our hope is not a calculation of probabilities; it is not just an ordinary feeling, or an optimistic attitude that things in the future will go well, as we sometimes say: let’s hope that everything goes well...hopefully...

But Christian hope, on the other hand, is the certainty of the future, until its final fulfillment. It is founded on something that is given to us now: which is the love of God. No one can ever separate us from the love of Christ. The foundation of our hope is love. Those who are loved walk towards the future with confidence and hope; those who are aware of being loved, know how to start all over again, even after moments of

disappointment or failure. Christian hope, founded in love, remains even in tribulation.

Pope Benedict, in his encyclical on hope, recalled that hope is a very concrete and not theoretical reality: *“God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter; situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us” (Spe salvi 31).*

Interesting expression: God with a “human face”: Jesus! Jesus is our hope! The love of Christ reaches in our present life. When the love of Christ is recognized as present, there is a place of reliable hope.

This year we are called to be pilgrims of hope, that is, a people on a journey who find in Christ and in his love, the foundation to face the future, even if we do not know it. Nobody knows the future. But we know that God’s love is faithful and is forever, and in his love, our future is secured.

Migrants and pilgrims

Being a pilgrim means being on a journey towards an important destination. A pilgrim goes through the adversities of life knowing that God never abandons him or her. We live in this part of the world; we are far from our homes and our countries of origin, being pilgrims, reminds us that we are migrants. Like a pilgrim, a migrant is also always on the move.

In the bull announcing the Jubilee, Pope Francis speaks of migrants with these words: *“Signs of hope should also be present for migrants who leave their homelands behind in search of a better life for themselves and for their families. Their expectations must not be frustrated by prejudice and rejection. A spirit of welcome, which embraces everyone with respect for his or her dignity, should be accompanied by a sense of responsibility, lest anyone be denied the right to a dignified existence” (Spes non confundit 13).*

We are a Church of migrants, we come from over a hundred different nations. Our life here depends on the condition of our jobs and on many circumstances that are not in our control. Precisely in these situations of being migrants, we are called to live with a greater passion, the role of being the pilgrims of hope.

Let's try to reflect on our condition as migrants. You have moved to these countries with a hope to work and build a better future for your family, for your children. To do this, you are willing to make many sacrifices and renunciations. Some of you we are here without your family. Your families are away back in your home countries, and you experience loneliness. Others of you have your family here with you, but you miss the grandparents and the other relatives. You have left behind the friends of your youth to be able to come here and find a job with the hope of a better future.

Being migrants always means dealing with limitations. While we here, even if we have a lot of help, we cannot have everything that we have in our countries of origin. We are in a very different country, a country with different traditions, languages, and religions. As pilgrims of hope we are called to work with all the people of goodwill, building a more fraternal world.

Being a migrant also means accepting the temporariness of life, willing to change, leaving the comforts of home, learning to be with people who in turn know that we are in this land for transition. We may remain in these countries for five, ten, twenty years or more. And in this period, we change jobs, homes and even cities. So, being a migrant means accepting that we are always on the move.

The common experience of being migrant is to feel that there is always something missing or lacking. But this experience of lacking should be an opportunity for us to open up to each other since we all have the same feeling of missing or lacking. Therefore, we can help each other to face together the future in solidarity. Precisely because of this temporary condition that characterizes us as migrants, we need Christian hope, a

hope that does not disappoint us because it is rooted in the love of Christ, an irrevocable love, a love forever.

Being migrants, we want to be pilgrims of hope. We know well that what we experience today is temporary. If we fix our hope on things that pass away, we expose ourselves to disappointment because everything changes. But if we recognize that Christ is our hope, we will also be able to live the difficult situations with patience and tenacity, knowing that the Lord always brings to completion, the good that he began in us.

Dear brothers and sisters, I invite you to live your reality of being migrants in this land of Arabia as part of your pilgrimage, towards the Kingdom of Heaven, continually supported by Christian hope. We are made for eternal happiness; let us not be deceived by the temporary goods. Let us not place our hope in what we have or what we own but place our hope in Christ. In this way we walk along the path of life, free from everything, from the old and new idols that enslave us. It is the freedom of being the children of God and placing our hope only in Christ. Let us not live this fact of being migrants passively! This is the way in which divine providence allows us to rediscover Christ as the living hope and to become his witnesses in this world.

Migrations, Society and Church

On the occasion of the Holy Year, I would like to recall that being a migrant is an increasingly common condition in the world. The history of humanity is marked by profound migratory processes that have mixed peoples. Sometimes these are peaceful processes, other times turbulent, in which tensions and clashes are not lacking.

However, we must recognize that for over a century and especially in recent decades, the phenomenon of migration has had an epochal turn. Especially through the development of transportation, migration has become a global phenomenon. Millions of people are moving from one part of the earth to another. People are mixing together as never before.

The mass migration is changing the face of societies and face of the Church. Precisely because of this universal nature of migration, Pope Francis has spoken very frequently about this phenomenon. And even today in his speeches he recommends to give great attention to the people who migrate. Recently he declared: *“the phenomenon of migration is not so much a short-term urgency..., but a reality of our times ... that must be governed with wise foresight”* (Marseille, 23 September 2023). Pope Francis knows the hardships of migrants well, rightly so, as he himself is a son of migrants who went from Italy to Argentina.

Therefore, being aware of this epochal change, being migrants and pilgrims of hope leads us to live intensely and in harmony, our being a Church composed of people who come from many different countries and at the same time promote peace and solidarity in social life. In this way, united in diversity, we can be a prophetic sign of the Kingdom of God.

Pilgrims of Hope, walking together

The words of Pope Francis at the beginning of his pontificate are very encouraging for us today: *“Never give way to discouragement! Ours is not a joy born of having many possessions, but from having encountered a Person: Jesus, in our midst; it is born from knowing that with him we are never alone, even at difficult moments, even when our life’s journey comes up against problems and obstacles that seem insurmountable, and there are so many of them! And in this moment, the enemy, the devil, comes, often disguised as an angel, and slyly speaks his word to us. Do not listen to him! Let us follow Jesus! We accompany, we follow Jesus, but above all, we know that he accompanies us and carries us on his shoulders. This is our joy, this is the hope that we must bring to this world. Please do not let yourselves be robbed of hope! Do not let hope be stolen! The hope that Jesus gives us”* (Palm Sunday 2013).

Pope Francis here explains the profound connection between hope and joy and therefore, being pilgrims of hope also means being pilgrims of joy. A joy that comes from the encounter with Christ, who is present among us in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, in the proclaimed word of

God, in the unity of the faithful, and in the poor. Therefore, in this jubilee we do not only remember a fact of the past, but an event contemporary to our life; Our Lord Jesus, who is dwelling with us and in us, here and now.

Therefore, to be pilgrims of hope we must walk together, not alone. The Christian community, the people of God are the people of hope because Jesus is present among us and remains with us at all times, in weakness and in joy. Let us help each other to walk together, let us support each other on the journey. The diversity that exists among us is in reality a wealth for an exchange of spiritual gifts that enriches us mutually.

United in faith (Nicene Creed)

We are united by the one Christian faith as Saint Paul writes to Ephesians: *“I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”* (Eph 4:1-5). The Creed is the proclamation of our faith. This year we will also celebrate one thousand seven hundred years since the Council of Nicaea, which gave us the Creed, which we recite every Sunday. The Nicene Creed attests to us that God is the foundation of our hope.

For 1700 years all Christians have professed the same faith that the Council of Nicaea formulated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this year we want to deepen the content of our Christian faith, our faith in God, the Trinity of Love, Father creator, redeeming Son and the sanctifying Spirit; the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and the eternal life in the risen Lord.

The Nicene Creed approved by the Council of the Bishops in the year 325 is still recognized today by all the Churches and denominations of Christianity. It is the profession of faith of the undivided Church in the fourth century, even though in the later centuries the Church was sadly

divided. Therefore, celebrating the Nicene Creed has a great ecumenical value, it pushes us to work for the promotion of unity among all Christians.

Above all, I invite you to discover how the Christian faith changes life, renews our heart and changes our relations with the reality. The Christian faith becomes a new way to understand and feel about our daily life, in the light and the love of God, who revealed himself in Jesus and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. I invite you to participate in the meetings organized in the different parishes of our Vicariate to deepen the content of our faith.

Shrines of the Jubilee in the Vicariate

I invite you to live with great vigor this holy year of hope. I encourage you to participate in the programs and the events of our vicariate planned for this jubilee year, especially in the churches declared as shrines for the jubilee, namely St Anthony of Padua Church in Ras Al Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates and Sts Peter and Paul Church in Ruwi in the Sultanate of Oman. I invite you do a pilgrimage to these Churches and receive a plenary indulgence. The Jubilee is always an extraordinary opportunity to experience the mercy of God and the forgiveness for our sins. There is no hope without mercy.

Even for those who are in Yemen, it is possible to celebrate the jubilee year by referring to the communities of the Missionaries of Charity present there. Furthermore, you will have the opportunity to participate in some of the international events planned in Rome, in particular I think of the pilgrimage that is planned with the young people in the beginning of August.

The Jubilee Prayer

Dearest faithful, hope does not disappoint us because it is rooted in the love of Christ. We hope that this jubilee year will strengthen us in hope and always make us joyful in the Lord.

May Mary, Mother of Hope and solace of migrants, protect us on the

journey of this Holy Year. May she help us to grow as a Church of migrants that becomes a prophetic sign of being the pilgrim of hope to witness to everyone the joy of the encounter with Christ, the light of the world and the prince of peace. I entrust to you the prayer that Pope Francis wrote for this Holy Year, the jubilee of the Lord that we want to joyfully journey as the pilgrims of hope.

**Father in heaven,
may the *faith* you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of *charity* enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed *hope*
for the coming of your Kingdom.**

**May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within
both humanity and the whole cosmos
in the sure expectation
of a new heaven and a new earth,
when, with the powers of Evil vanquished,
your glory will shine eternally.**

**May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, *Pilgrims of Hope*,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.**

**May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.**

**To you our God, eternally blessed,
be glory and praise for ever.**

Amen.

JUBILEE OF HOPE

History

In January 1300, crowds of pilgrims spontaneously made a pilgrimage to St. Peter's tomb in Rome to revitalize their faith. They asked Pope Boniface VIII to grant a special indulgence, as an added spiritual benefit of their pilgrimage. The Pope proclaimed a plenary indulgence for those who visited the tombs of Sts Peter and Paul every 100 years – the first Jubilee. Pope Clement VI reduced this to 50 years in 1343, and Pope Paul II to 25 years in 1470. Since then, there have been 26 Ordinary Jubilees in the history of the Catholic Church – the last being the Great Jubilee of 2000. There are also special Extraordinary Jubilee years announced by the Pope focusing on particular spiritual themes. These include the Holy Year of Mercy (in 2015) or the Holy Year of Arabian Martyrs (only for Arabia, in 2024).



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