

THE WAY to peace



The prayer intentions that Pope Francis left for the coming months help us to navigate the path to peace, no matter where we are starting from, says **Fr Paul Nicholson SJ**.

Approaching Jerusalem as his passion drew near, Jesus lamented over the city: 'If you had only recognised on this day the way to peace!' (Luke 19:42) This saying can be used as a thread to draw together the intentions that Pope Francis proposed to his Worldwide Prayer Network for the coming months.

The intention for August recognises that in practice 'the way to peace' is often unclear, in the face of so many alternative ways leading to confrontation, for a variety of reasons. Different societies face different challenges in this regard. Your own society will have its particular difficulties, and these might well come into your prayer. Pope Francis singled out ethnic, political, religious and ideological divides that can come between people, inviting us to pray for the gift of being able, even in the face of these, to coexist peacefully.

This idea is taken further by the October intention, which acknowledges that people of faith are by no means exempt from conflict, and that these same kind of differences can be found between (and even within) religious traditions. It is noteworthy, though, that here we are invited to pray not merely for coexistence, but that these traditions might be able to work together effectively. Such work builds on what it is presumed the traditions have in common: a concern for justice and



human fraternity and, once again and as a firm foundation for these, peace.

In the various teachings that Pope Francis offered the Church during the twelve years of his papacy, one of his regular themes was that the challenges that the world faces in respect of poverty and of environmental degradation are not two separate issues but form one linked call to action. It is, for instance, often the poorest people on the planet who are most directly affected by climate change. So praying for peace in the September intention takes the form of asking that we might be more aware of the interdependence of the whole of God's creation, so that we might better care for it, and for all human beings as part of it.

Whether we seek peace at the level of different religious traditions, the variety of human societies, or indeed the whole diversity of God's rich creation, the question of how we can best practically work here cannot be avoided. It is no surprise, then,

INTENTIONS FOR THIS PERIOD

JULY

For formation in discernment.

Let us pray that we might again learn how to discern, to know how to choose paths of life and reject everything that leads us away from Christ and the Gospel.

AUGUST

For mutual coexistence.

Let us pray that societies where coexistence seems more difficult might not succumb to the temptation of confrontation for ethnic, political, religious or ideological reasons.

SEPTEMBER

For our relationship with all of creation.

Let us pray that, inspired by Saint Francis, we might experience our interdependence with all creatures who are loved by God and worthy of love and respect.

OCTOBER

For collaboration between different religious traditions.

Let us pray that believers in different religious traditions might work together to defend and promote peace, justice and human fraternity.

that the first of this set of prayer intentions, the one proposed for July, asks God to help us become more deeply discerning people, better able to recognise those 'paths of life' leading us towards Christ and the gospel. Without this discernment there is the danger that our efforts for coexistence and collaboration may be in vain. So this first intention is the basis on which the others build.

The beginning of September, the mid-point of these intentions, is also the start of the month-long ecumenical 'Season of Creation'. We ask that all of our prayer in these months might enable us to celebrate that season fittingly. ●