

Rome, 24 December 2007

*To the members of the Congregation of the Mission*

Dear Brothers,

May the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ fill your hearts now and forever!

Merry Christmas!

I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your prayers and expressions of solidarity through Christmas cards and e-mails with the message about this holy time. I would like to be able to respond personally to each of the greetings that I have received, but I will make use of this modern means of communication<sup>1</sup> to extend to you in my name and in the name of all the members of the Curia here in Rome, our hopes for a most blessed Christmas and a new year filled with peace, happiness and love for all. I ask especially that the Lord fill all of you with his grace so that you might help to extend that peace, happiness and love among yourselves and most especially with the poor.

Just yesterday, 23 December, I returned from a ten-day visit to the Middle East. I was struck by the contrasts between the hopes for creating an environment of peace with all the decorations, nativity scenes and the like that have been set up in public places by the Christians, and the awareness of the instability in the government of Lebanon as representative of the instability in many of the places where we are called to serve as Vincentians.

One particular scene expresses it clearly. Not far from the Provincial Houses of the Daughters of Charity and the Congregation of the Mission in Lebanon there is a square where the nativity scene was set up. In front of the nativity scene there was a military tank and on the corners around the square a heavy presence of military vigilance.

In visiting the holy lands I want you all to know that in each of the holy places that we visited a prayer was said for you, for us. Among the places that we visited I had the opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist together with other members of the family at the Lake of Tiberius, where Jesus asked Peter the question three times "Do you love me?" and established his primacy as head of the Church. At that time I prayed for each of us who are members of this Church

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<sup>1</sup> The letter was sent by e-mail and published at <http://cmglobal.org>

that we might be given the grace to establish a true community of faith, hope and love.

I also celebrated the Eucharist in the place of the Annunciation where Mary said her “Yes” to God and I prayed that we all might continually say “yes” to God, recalling the first fervor with which we gave ourselves to the Company, to the Congregation or to our Association. Later the following day I celebrated the Eucharist in the Tomb of Our Lord Jesus Christ and there I prayed that all of us might live deeply that new life, that the resurrection made possible for us all and that we share that life continually among ourselves and for the poor.

The day before I left we celebrated the Eucharist in the occupied territory of Bethlehem, at the wall in the city of Bethlehem in the very spot in which “the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us.” And I prayed especially that all of us as a Vincentian Family may continually worship God as he came into our lives as man in the person of Jesus Christ and to honor him by living the values of the gospel as he has taught us and to do so above all for and with the poor and from their reality that we all together might be ever loving builders of peace, offering hope in a world where many live without hope.

***Merry Christmas!***

Your brother in Saint Vincent,

G. Gregory Gay, C.M.  
Superior General