

December 14,2021

The Nov. Dec. Joyful Noiseletter offers this insight on p. 1: "With the angel's greeting to Mary-'kaire' in Greek, which means 'be joyful'--the New Testament begins. The first words of the New Testament are 'be joyful,' 'be happy.' Joy is the true meaning of Christmas. Joy is the true gift of Christmas, not expensive gifts that cost time and money. With a smile, an act of kindness, a little help, forgiveness, you can bring joy, and that joy will come back to you." from Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

When Pope Francis visited Cyprus and Greece, Dec. 2-6, he held an ecumenical prayer service with young migrants, Dec. 2, in Nicosia, Cyprus. His four page response to the testimonies of four of the migrants is remarkable for its blending of anguish over refugees and Christian divisions: "hatred has also polluted our relations between Christians." But "we are on the way from conflict to communion. . . . proud of our peculiarities; proud to be different, of these peculiarities that are a gift of God. Different, proud to be so, but always reconciled, always brothers."

Pope Francis praised Cyprus for being "a laboratory of fraternity," but also recognized that because of its small size, Cyprus can not take in every migrant who comes to its shores. He concluded this talk by reminding all of the shock of "a hatred which is called barbed wire."

His meeting with Greek Orthodox Beatitude Ieronymos II in the throne room of the Orthodox Archbishopric of Greece in Athens, Dec. 4, was especially significant. There are some Greek Orthodox leaders, especially monks, who still remember how the Crusaders from Roman Catholic countries devastated Greece and Constantinople on their way to the Holy Land in 1204. Pope St. John Paul II spent many years attempting to visit Greece, finally doing so on May 4, 2001, when he publicly asked the Greek Orthodox Archbishop Beatitude Christodoulos I, Ieronymos' predecessor, for forgiveness. The two then signed a joint statement, which signing represented almost a complete turnaround of relations in Greece between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

Pope Francis, in his address on Dec. 4 to Ieronymos' statement, continued to apologize for "errors committed by so many Catholics." But he also strongly linked the oil of the Holy Spirit to welcome migrants and continue to bring Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox together. We have come much closer in the past 20 year than most thought possible!

Both documents are available on the Vatican website, using date and title.

Our Oblate Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation website has much more on the care of migrants and refugees: www.omiusajpic.org. Our Oblate Mission-Unity-Dialogue website has a special page on Eastern Christianity: www.harrywinter.org.

Many thanks to those who responded to the Nov. 19 Five Ways e-letter. May each of us and our loved ones have a most Blessed and Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

In Christ's love,

Fr. Harry Winter, O.M.I.