

INAUGURAL MESSAGE

*To all the citizens and
residents of the UAE, Oman and Yemen*



BISHOP PAOLO MARTINELLI OFM CAP.
APOSTOLIC VICAR OF SOUTHERN ARABIA

BISHOP PAOLO MARTINELLI OFM CAP.

APOSTOLIC VICAR OF SOUTHERN ARABIA

Your Highnesses the rulers, esteemed authorities, religious leaders, and my dear brothers and sisters living in the United Arab Emirates, the Sultanate of Oman and Yemen, as-salamu alaykum! Peace be with you all!

With great joy, I am addressing you for the first time since my appointment as the Apostolic Vicar for Southern Arabia.

Thanksgiving

First of all, I wish to thank the Almighty God who has chosen me to serve in this part of the world. I place my trust in his Providence as I begin my mission in the Vicariate.

I wish to express my gratitude to His Holiness Pope Francis, for this unexpected appointment, which I accepted with all humility and willingness to serve the people in this Vicariate. I sincerely hope to work closely with you all.

After eight years of service in the Diocese of Milan, as auxiliary bishop, the Lord calls me to be a shepherd in this region so unlike my homeland, but which I find fascinating on so many levels.

I thank Bishop Paul Hinder OFM Cap. for his whole-hearted welcome. I take this opportunity to express my

deep admiration for the great work and wise counsel that he demonstrated during his 18 years of service as the Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia. I wish and will try to follow his example as I place myself completely at the disposal of God's people in this land.

I also wish to express much admiration and gratitude to all the priests, religious men and women, and the lay faithful who are working in the Vicariate. A special “thank you” to the Capuchin Order which is strongly committed to the mission of serving in this region.

I very much appreciate the important work carried out in all the parishes of this Vicariate, the pastoral activities, and, in particular, the invaluable contributions by the Catholic schools. Parish churches are a decisive meeting point for all the people, for all the faithful, and especially for all the families.

May all the families be blessed by God! How important they are for the Church and for society! We celebrate this year as a special time dedicated to the family. According to the document *Amoris Laetitia*: each family is called to be a “domestic church”. May our families always welcome Jesus in their lives.

In addition, ours is a Church of migrants; this in a certain sense expresses the very nature of the whole Church.

We are all pilgrims on this earth, and we look forward to the fullness of the kingdom of God.

I would also like to extend my greetings to all Christians belonging to other churches. I invite all the baptized to strengthen mutual knowledge and work together in the hope of, one day, being able to celebrate the Holy mysteries together at the same altar, sharing the same bread and drinking from the same chalice of salvation.

My deep appreciation goes to this land, which houses numerous traditions; it is a crossroad where people from many nations meet, interact and work together on a daily basis.

The rulers, authorities, and dignitaries of these nations have my full respect for promoting the spirit of respectful coexistence and tolerance. St. Paul in his writings asks us to pray for our rulers. I pray that the rulers of these countries be given the wisdom from God to lead the nations and peoples under their care on the path of peace and prosperity. God has called all human beings to live together as brothers and sisters, even if they belong to different cultures, peoples and religions.

My special prayers go to all who are in need. In a particular way, I pray for the people of Yemen, especially the children, who have been suffering because of the conflict for several years. Not forgetting the four Missionaries of

Charity who, together with some lay people, were killed six years ago, in 2016, remaining faithful to the last in their service of the sick and the suffering. May God bring peace and hope to the lives of the people in Yemen.

Interreligious Dialogue and Building a Fraternal World

To my brothers and sisters of different faiths, I come to you as a brother. I believe that, by working together as collaborators and companions, we can conquer every challenge. The recent pandemic, despite its brutal face, has taught us to stand for each other. At the very beginning of my office as the shepherd of this Vicariate, I express a great desire to elevate interreligious dialogue and the promotion of universal brotherhood according to the spirit of the document on Human Fraternity, signed by Holy Father, Pope Francis, and Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, on 4th February 2019. In the introduction of this decisive document we read, *“Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved”*. Hence, different religions can greatly contribute to societies throughout the world by promoting peace and love.

The fact that this important document was signed here in Abu Dhabi, makes us all responsible for its message

of peace, as it invites all religions to work together for the common good and promotion of goodwill because every person is loved by God. We all are indeed called to build up a more fraternal world.

Furthermore, it is my great desire to be able to act pastorally by promoting the contents of *Fratelli tutti* (*Brothers all*), the encyclical letter on fraternity and social friendship and thus to promote peace and justice together with every person of goodwill. This encyclical letter was signed by Pope Francis in Assisi, at the tomb of Saint Francis, the saint of universal brotherhood. At the beginning of this prophetic letter Pope Francis reminds us that the great saint of Assisi declared “blessed all those who love their brother “as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him”. In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to “acknowledge, appreciate and love each person”.

The Life of the Church

In my address to the Catholic faithful, in particular, I wish to express my desire to serve and help them grow in their Christian lives, promoting the beauty of belonging to the one body of Christ, which is the Church, made up of different cultures, spiritual traditions and liturgical rites. All this is great richness; the differences of gifts

must never divide us, but make our unity more fruitful: pluriformity in unity!

The Holy Spirit brings forth many different gifts, but the same Spirit creates overall unity. The Holy Spirit is “Harmony” itself, wrote an ancient Father of the Church (St. Gregory of Nyssa). Let us be docile to the Holy Spirit and to the Church, which has the task of discernment.

Indeed, the bishop's first task is to ensure the pastoral care of his flock as much as possible. I think of the fundamental importance of promoting Christian life in all its dimensions: a life of prayer; listening to and contemplating the Word of God; the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. It is precisely in the Eucharist that we find the beauty, joy, and fullness of being Christians, encompassed in the faithful love of Jesus Christ, who gave up his own life for our salvation.

We all are called to deepen the relationship between faith and daily life; between the Gospel and our way of thinking about the meaning of life. Especially the link between the Eucharist and our daily activities: the Christian life has a Eucharistic shape. An ancient author said that Christians are those who live according to the mystery they celebrate in the Eucharist. Christians are "*those living in accordance with the Lord's Day*" (Saint Ignatius of Antioch). This phrase highlights the

connection between the reality of the Eucharist and everyday Christian life.

From the very beginning of my ministry, and in accordance with the guidance of Pope Francis, I wish to stress the importance of promoting more and more synodality in our Church. I greatly admire the synodal path you have taken already under the guidance of Bishop Paul Hinder. This truly is the right path on which we must continue our journey. To be a synodal Church means always listening to the Word of God, promoting mutual dialogue, sharing our ordinary lives, actively participating in the life of our communities and the liturgical actions, supporting intimate communion among all the faithful, assuming the full responsibility of living the Gospel in daily life, in order to make our contribution for the good of all.

In sharing and charity, I express the importance of living deeply in the spirit of mutual solidarity, in particular with all those who are in need. Jesus commanded us to “love one another as I loved you”.

Final Prayer

I ask God for the grace to be a shepherd according to the heart of Christ and I ask for the blessing of the Most High Lord upon all Catholics, all Christians and all the inhabitants of this land. We very well know that regardless of our sincere commitment and effort to bring about

a more just and supportive world, we cannot achieve anything without the grace of God: we rely completely on God's mercy to improve this world: as it is written in Psalm 127, "*If the Lord does not build the house, the builders toil in vain. If the Lord does not watch over the city, the watchman keeps watch in vain*".

I conclude by invoking upon you the blessing of God in the words of St. Francis to brother Leo: "*The Lord bless you and keep you. May He show His face to you and have mercy. May He turn His countenance to you and give you peace. The Lord bless you!*"

May Mary Most Holy, Mother of God, keep us in goodness, with her maternal protection always accompanying us. To her, I entrust my ministry in this land. I entrust all of you to her love.

And, I humbly ask you to pray for me and my ministry in the Vicariate.

+ Br. Paolo Martinelli, OFM Cap.
Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia

Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2022.



**APOSTOLIC VICARIATE
OF SOUTHERN ARABIA**

The Catholic Church in UAE, Oman & Yemen

P.O. Box 54, Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates.
Tel: +971 2 446 1895
Email: info@avosa.org
www.avosa.org

   @avosarabia