



The Holy See

**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE CHURCH OF SYRACUSE ON THE OCCASION
OF THE TEMPORARY **TRANSLATION**
OF THE **BODY OF SAINT LUCIA****

Dear brother

Archbishop Francesco LOMANTO

Metropolitan of Syracuse

I have learned with joy that the Church of Syracuse is celebrating the Lucian Year, dedicated to the Virgin and Martyr Lucy, your fellow citizen. The affection that binds you to Saint Lucy has thus led you back to one of the oldest Christian understandings: “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn 1:5). And remember that immediately the Apostle adds: ‘If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth, but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another’ (1 Jn 1:6-7). On the feast day of your Patroness, I write to you, dear Brother, and to the entire archdiocesan community, that these words of salvation may also direct your path today and renew in the spirit of the Gospel the family, ecclesial and social bonds of which your beautiful city is woven.

This year the month of December will culminate in the beginning of the Jubilee which wants us to be “Pilgrims of hope”, but is marked for you by another pilgrimage, that of Saint Lucy from Venice to Syracuse, from the city that has enshrined her body for eight centuries to the one where her witness first shone, spreading light throughout the world. In this movement towards you, the mystery is reflected the mystery of a God who always takes the first step, who never asks for what He Himself is unwilling to do. Saint Lucy is coming to you, so that you yourselves may be men and women of the first step, daughters and sons of a God who makes Himself known. The communion between two particular Churches, which has made this temporary move possible, in turn points to a way of inhabiting the world that can overcome the darkness that surrounds us: there is light where gifts are exchanged, where the treasure of one is wealth for the other. The lie that destroys fraternity and devastates creation suggests, instead, the opposite: that the other is an antagonist

and his fortune a threat. Too often human beings see themselves this way.

Dear friends, Lucy is a woman and her saintliness shows you and all Churches how women have their own ways of following the Lord. Ever since the Gospel narratives, the women disciples of Jesus are witnesses of an intelligence and a love without which the message of the Resurrection would not be able to reach us. The simulacrum of your Patroness, if you look closely, vigorously expresses the dignity and the capacity to look far, which Christian women bring to the centre of social life today too, not letting any worldly power lock them away in invisibility and silence. We need the work and word of women in an outgoing Church, that may be leaven and light in culture and in coexistence. And even more so in the heart of the Mediterranean, cradle of civilization and humanism, tragically at the centre of injustices and inequalities that, ever since my first Apostolic Journey in Lampedusa, I have suggested transforming from a culture of rejection into a culture of encounter. The martyrdom of Saint Lucy educates us in weeping, compassion and tenderness: these are virtues confirmed by the Tears of Our Lady in Syracuse. They are virtues that are not only Christian, but also political. They represent the true strength that builds the city. They give us back eyes to see, the sight that insensitivity causes us to lose dramatically. And how important it is to pray for our eyes to be healed!

Taking the side of the light, dear brothers and sisters, exposes us to martyrdom too. Perhaps no-one will lay their hands on us, but choosing which side to take will take away some of our tranquility. Indeed, there are forms of tranquility that resemble the peace of the cemetery. Absent, as if already dead, yet present, but like tombs: beautiful on the outside but empty inside. Instead, we choose life. We would not be able to do otherwise: "The life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us" (1 Jn 1:2). Gathering around a Saint – and I am thinking of the immense crowd that surrounds Saint Lucy in Syracuse – means having seen life manifest itself and now choosing the side of the light. To be clear, transparent, sincere people; to communicate with others in an open, clear, respectful manner; to emerge from the ambiguities of life and criminal connivance; not to be afraid of difficulties. Let us never tire of educating children, adolescents and adults - starting with ourselves - to listen to the heart, to recognize witnesses, to cultivate a critical sense, to obey conscience. God is light, and its reverberation is a community of brothers and sisters trained in freedom, who do not sceptically indulge in what - they say - will never change. To choose: here is the glowing core of every vocation, the personal response to the call that the saints represent in our journey. They show how to come out of "those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune. ... Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 270).

Dear Brother, dear faithful of Syracuse, do not forget to bring spiritually to your celebration the sisters and brothers who suffer throughout the world as a result of persecution and injustice. Include migrants, refugees, the poor who are in your midst. And please, remember to pray for me

too. May the intercession of Saint Lucy and Our Lady of Tears accompany your people, to whom I affectionately impart the apostolic Blessing.

Rome, from Saint John Lateran, 13 December 2024

FRANCIS

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