

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO BISHOPS ON THE FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS**

28 December 2016

[Link](#)

[...] The same thing is asked of us pastors today: to be men attentive, and not deaf, to the voice of God, and hence more sensitive to what is happening all around us. Today, with Saint Joseph as our model, we are asked not to let ourselves be robbed of joy. We are asked to protect this joy from the Herods of our own time. Like Joseph, we need the courage to respond to this reality, to arise and take it firmly in hand (cf. *Mt 2:20*). The courage to guard this joy from the new Herods of our time, who devour the innocence of our children. An innocence robbed from them by the oppression of illegal slave labour, prostitution and exploitation. An innocence shattered by wars and forced immigration, with the great loss that this entails. Thousands of our children have fallen into the hands of gangs, criminal organizations and merchants of death, who only devour and exploit their neediness.

To illustrate this point, there are at present 75 million children who, due to prolonged situations of emergency and crisis, have had to interrupt their education. In 2015, 68% of all persons who were victims of sexual exploitation were children. At the same time, a third of all children who have to live outside their homelands do so because forcibly displaced. We live in a world where almost half of the children who die under the age of five do so because of malnutrition. It is estimated that in 2016 there were 150 million child labourers, many of whom live in conditions of slavery. According to the most recent report presented by UNICEF, unless the world situation changes, in 2030 there will be 167 million children living in extreme poverty, 69 million children under the age of five will die between 2016 and 2030, and 16 million children will not receive basic schooling. [...]