

# Ubuntu: We Become Human through other People

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## *2013 Christmas Message from Brother Superior General*

*“Africans have this thing called UBUNTU. It is about the essence of being human, it is part of the gift that Africa will give to the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being able to go the extra mile for the sake of others.*

*We believe that a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up, inextricably, with yours.”*

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Each time I go to Africa I am impressed by the extraordinary welcoming attitude of the people. Wherever you go you find folks walking in the street that would kindly reply to your greeting by raising both hands, palms directed towards you. For me this is a beautiful sign of hospitality, as if they said: “Welcome, I receive you with open arms. As you see, I hide nothing in my hands; I wish you only well”.

In my opinion, such a natural and spontaneous welcoming attitude is an expression, among others, of *Ubuntu*, a Nguni word from Southern Africa which refers to our shared humanity, to the fact that we are all interconnected, and because of this connection, we are responsible for each other.



Those of us who come from cultures in which individualism is revered, are surprised by this way of understanding life, and are reminded of the social values we have left aside and often replaced by a compulsive need to accumulate belongings and protect them, as well as by a self-referential egoism, well-hidden behind the unquestionable right to “personal liberty”.

Christmas reminds us of the divine character of every human being, since the Son of God by His incarnation has united Himself in some fashion with every person (II Vatican Council). We know we are inhabited by Mystery, and therefore share the most essential dimension of our lives, which manifests itself as goodness and love.

Nelson Mandela acknowledges this in his autobiography: *I have always known that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Even at the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished.*

Yes, our lives are closely interconnected in mysterious but real ways. Precisely for this reason, the participants in the General Conference last September in Notre Dame de l'Hermitage, were touched by the reality of children and youth, particularly those who are in situations of vulnerability in different parts of the world. Aware of the validity of our vocation to universal fraternity, we restated our commitment to service and to being available without borders, at the feet of Our Lady of Fourvière.

Moreover, our choice to live in community visibly expresses our connection and interdependence. Our recently beatified martyrs were aware of this when they decided to share the fate of their fellow community brothers, even if they had the chance to avoid it.

I also think that the upcoming celebration of the *Marist International Mission Assembly* in Nairobi (Kenya) – the culmination of a joint process developed by brothers and lay people in the five continents – will allow us to concretely experience the meaning of Ubuntu, and apply it to our daily lives.

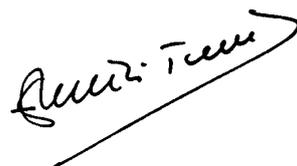
Another opportunity to fully live our international dimension will be the process leading to the celebration of the Marist bicentenary in 2017. A three-year preparation process for that event will be launched on October 28, 2014 – the anniversary of the encounter between Father Champagnat and young Montagne, triggering factor for the foundation of the Institute. The recent opening of the renovated La Valla house, where this small community with a universal horizon began, invites us to strive for a *new beginning* today, faithful to our origins and tradition, but incarnated in the situation we are living here and today.

*Ubuntu*: I am because we are! That is, we become human through other people. And precisely because everyone is an inseparable part of the human fabric, what we do or fail to do has consequences for the lives of others.

For example, looking at the humble beginnings in La Valla, nobody could have imagined that the Institute would spread across five continents, and influence the lives of so many children and youngsters. It was also very difficult for many people to imagine the extraordinary transformative power that was hidden in the little son of Mary and Joseph called Jesus.

May the celebration of Christmas 2013 help us become aware of our interdependence and our responsibility to turn Planet Earth into a more habitable and fraternal place, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, who changed many aspects of the course of history in a humble and unobtrusive way by fully sharing our humanity.

Merry Christmas!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Emili Turú", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line that ends in a small arrowhead pointing to the right.

Emili Turú