



From A Bishop's Journal (787)

The Long March to Peace

In 1967, faced with the many conflicts in the world and confronted with constant threats of wars and rebellions, of armed conflicts and wars, Pope Paul VI called on all the people of good will, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, to dedicate the first day of every civil year to the cause of peace. For us in America, such a day could not have fallen on a better date: We wish one another the peace of the New Year and we pray that peace be established in our hearts, our homes, countries, and all around the world.

Vital Messages

Since 1967, every single pope has given us important and even revolutionary messages about peace. Pope Paul VI even went as far as saying that the name of peace was the development of peoples. In his encyclical letter on the development of peoples, he wrote: “The progressive development of peoples is an object of deep interest and concern to the Church. This is particularly true in the case of those peoples who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance; of those who are seeking a larger share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are consciously striving for fuller growth”.

Forceful Messages

In the wake of the prophets of old, Pope Pius XII declared that peace was the fruit of justice. The words *Pax opus justitiae* (“Peace is the work of justice”) could be read on his coat of arms. John XXIII, in one of the most remarkable encyclicals ever written in the twentieth century on peace, maintained that peace was founded on justice, love, and freedom. In this way he reiterated the living message of the Church, that without love, without truth, and without freedom, there can be no peace. As for John Paul II, he took another step forward: Without due respect for human rights, there can be no peace. On every Day of Peace, according to situations and events of his long pontificate, he wrote on the different facets of peace. He wrote 28 messages, and I do not believe that it is a waste of time to list them. Every single message presented human or inhuman situations on which he invoked peace. You will notice how much he refers to the Council and to Pope John XXIII.

32 Messages

Two months after his election, he wrote “To Reach Peace, Teach Peace” (1979); in 1980 he wrote about “Truth, the Power of Peace.” A few months following the attempt on his life in St. Peter’s Square, he wrote that in order “To Serve Peace, Respect Freedom.” In 1982, he wrote that peace is “A Gift of God Entrusted to Us.” In 1983, he wrote on “Dialogue for Peace, A Challenge for Our Time.” Major dialogues were already beginning between East and West, between Poland and Russia. “From a new Heart, Peace Is Born”(1984); “Peace and Youth go Forward Together” (1985). “Peace is a Value with no Frontiers North-South, East-West: Only One Peace” (1986); “Development and Solidarity: Two Keys to Peace” (1987). “Religious Freedom: Condition for Peace” (1988); “To Build Peace, Respect Minorities” (1989); “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All the Creation” (1990); “If You Want Peace, Respect the Conscience of Every Person” (1991). He also wrote about “Believers United in Building Peace (1992); “If you want Peace, Reach out to the Poor” (1993); “The Family Creates the Peace of the Human Family” (1994). “Women, Teachers of peace” (1995); “Let Us Give Children a Future of Peace” (1996); “Offer Forgiveness and Receive Peace” (1997); “From the Justice of Each Comes Peace for All” (1998); “Respect for Human Rights: the Secret of True Peace” (1999); “Peace on Earth to those Whom God Loves” (the Jubilee Year 2000). “Dialogue between Cultures for a Civilisation of Love and Peace” (2001); “No peace without justice, No justice without Forgiveness” (2002); “*Pacem in Terris*: A Permanent Commitment” (2003); “An Ever Timely Commitment: Teaching Peace” (2004); and, a few months before his death: “Do Not be Overcome by Evil Overcome Evil with Good” (2005). Pope Benedict XVI continues in the same vein: “In Truth, Peace” (2006); “The Human Person, the Heart of Peace” (2007); “The Human Family, A Community of Peace (2008); and this year (2009): “Fighting Poverty to Build Peace.”

Instruments of Peace

This long list of messages is like a pilgrimage through time, a pilgrimage where we come across the guideposts to peace. A long pilgrimage introducing us to a long list of peacemakers: the family, the human person, youth and children, women, ecologists, those in public office, etc. Everyone is required to be an instrument of peace. This year’s theme, “Fighting Poverty to Build Peace,” ties in with the messages of 1993 – “If You Wish Peace, Reach out to the Poor” – and 1999 – “Respect for Human Rights: the Secret of True Peace”. At this time when a financial crisis is shaking our countries and the world’s richest groups, it is first and foremost to the banks and the unscrupulous multinationals that have pocketed huge sums for years, billions and billions of dollars in revenue, that governments and reserves have given the most astronomical amounts. It is the richest of the rich who came hat in hand to demand, practically with blackmail and extortion, the most fabulous amounts in the history of the world, to prop them up again. And this, while governments hesitate and even refuse to increase the littlest bit the benefits of social welfare recipients, or to lend them the smallest amount at low interest: One law for the rich and another for the poor, which only serves to increase the chasm that exists between rich and poor. The parable of Dives and Lazarus continues even today. Who can predict, without being unduly pessimistic, the kind of life that the poor will have to live, in coming years? Pope Benedict has every reason to call the attention of all the powers that be, in these difficult times; We must fight poverty, if we are to have true peace. May all the acts of justice, kindness, service, and even demands for the poor help our brothers and sisters have a more decent and happier

life. The goods of the earth belong to all and must not be the property of a well-kept minority that is fixated on itself. Every human being is born free and equal in dignity and rights, or so does the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaim, and the glory of God demands it. It is an insult to God our Creator that we have brothers and sisters who lack the barest minimum to keep body and soul together, who die of cold and hunger in a society of well-off and well provided for. May the year 2009 be good to us and to everyone! May the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God and mother of Jesus who was poor among the poor, give us her most gracious blessings.

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02-11-09