

Pius, XII, Pope, 1876-1958

ADS8757

1950 Christmas...

1950 Christmas Message

of Pope Pius XII



National Catholic Welfare Conference

1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W. Washington 5, D. C.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

<https://archive.org/details/1950christmasmespius>

Holy Father's 1950 Christmas Message to the World

Official English translation of the Annual Christmas Message of Pope Pius XII, broadcast to the world December 23, 1950.

I

THE END OF THE HOLY YEAR

A YEAR has already passed, Venerable Brethren, and beloved children, since last Christmas Eve, that memorable day when, amid the intense expectation of the Catholic world, We promulgated and initiated the great Jubilee which has left a profound mark on the life of the Church and surpassed the most sanguine hopes.

We still seem to hear, as if it happened yesterday, the blows of the hammer opening the sacred portal, that has been the spiritual goal of all nations, and to listen to the jubilant applause of the faithful which greeted the announcement.

At that moment the Angel of the Lord, as it were, sped from that sacred threshold to the four corners of the earth to marshal and escort to the common fatherland of the faithful the countless throngs of pilgrims who, yearning to be purified in the life-giving waters of penance, eagerly sought to bring about the great return and to win the great pardon.

Today, the same Angel seems to say, as of old the Archangel said to Tobias: "It is time therefore that I return to him that sent me; but bless ye God, and publish all his wonderful works. (Tob. 12,20).

The word "end," which the law of the present life imposes on all that is dearest and most sacred and on every event be it the most joyous and fruitful, shall be also written on the Holy Doors of Jubilee, leaving in our hearts a sense at once of supreme joy and of nostalgic regret, like to that which accompanied the three Apostles as they came down from Mount Thabor.

If it is right and fitting that we return thanks at all times and in all places to the Father, Giver of every good and perfect gift, how much more fervidly tomorrow, when We have put the seal on the Holy Door, will there arise from Our heart and Our lips the thanksgiving hymn which the voices of the Catholic world will chant in harmony with a special note of exultation, in a thousand different accents, yet with one sole sentiment.

INCOMPARABLE MARVEL

As We pause for the last time on the threshold trodden by the feet of so many pilgrims who came to seek their purification and pardon, there will be present to Our mind, as in a single vision, all the wonderful events of this truly incomparable year, the grandeur and magnificence of the great liturgical functions, the invisible splendors, ever so much more beauti-

ful, of souls renewed and sanctified in tears of repentance at the tribunal of penance, and in tears of love at the foot of the altar.

We shall live again in thoughts of solemn canonization and beatification ceremonies, the living witness of the great achievements of human nature, strengthened by Divine Grace and of the numerous beneficent works to which the Church has given birth in every age.

We shall hear again the irrepressible shouts of jubilation, the devout prayers and hymns whose enthusiastic chorus was re-echoed from the vaults of the Vatican Basilica, which, being unable to hold the ever-growing multitudes took on new dimensions, stretching forth the arms of its colonnades to receive them. We shall see again in spirit Easter Sunday and the Feast of Corpus Christi, the evening of the canonization of St. Maria Goretti, the morning lit with an unusual secret splendor when the dogma of the Assumption of Mary was proclaimed. We shall see once more the great processions of penance and propitiation which honored, through the streets of Christian Rome, the venerable images of the Crucified and of the Virgin.

There will crowd in upon Our mind the memories of all the congresses which have met to study the sacred sciences and problems of the apostolate, the echoes of Our discourses, the living voice of peoples throughout the world, the Pontifical documents addressed to such a great variety of persons, and especially the Encyclical *Humani Generis*, and Our exhortations

to the clergy, from which we expect the most fruitful results.

TOUCHING MEMORIES

There will pass before Our mind's eye with deep sense of loss the cherished memory of your countenances, the countenances of you, especially, Venerable Brethren in the Episcopacy, who flocked to Us in such imposing numbers and listened to Our words with such docility, and then your countenances also, beloved sons and daughters.

We shall never be able to forget the expression of your eyes, even more the motion of your lips, when you came to confide in Us your sorrows and your intimate hopes. Our heart was touched with unspeakable emotion every time We descended into the midst of Our dear Christian people.

No anxiety, no weariness was ever able to prevent Us from satisfying your earnest desire, or make Us omit Our meetings with you. To admit you into Our presence, or rather to expect you and to long for you, was more a need of Our heart than a duty of Our pastoral office. Every time We delayed in saluting you, calling out your names by nations, by dioceses, by parishes and by groups, We wished, as it were, to gather all your words, all your prayers which you desired to have pass through Our hands in order to present them to Jesus.

How We would have then wished to press all of you to Our heart, to make known to all how We returned tenderness with tenderness, and instill a word of confidence and of hope into

all your hearts—into your hearts especially, beloved of Jesus and Ourselves, the poor and sick, who on some days formed the most beautiful adornment of the Vatican Basilica, and in whom We have always seen the richest and most precious treasure of the Church.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE TOMB OF THE PRINCE OF THE APOSTLES

If, however, during the Holy Year the Confession of St. Peter in the Vatican has been the witness and center of such impressive manifestations of the unity of Catholics of the entire world in faith and in love, the glory of this sacred place has been increased also in another respect: the excavations beneath the same Confession, at least in as much as they concern the tomb of the Apostle (explorations which have been the object of Our thoughtful attention from the first months of Our Pontificate), and their scientific examination have been brought to a happy conclusion in the course of this Jubilee Year. In a very short time, a documented work will be published which will bring to the knowledge of the public the results of these explorations, which have been carried out with the greatest care.

This work has had most fruitful and important results. But the essential question is this: has the tomb of St. Peter really been found? To that question the answer is beyond all doubt: Yes. The tomb of the Prince of the Apostles has been found. Such is the final conclusion after all the labor and study of these years.

A second question, subordinate to the first, refers to the relics of St. Peter.

Have they been found? At the side of the tomb, the remains of human bones have been found. However, it is impossible to prove with certainty that they belong to the body of the Apostle. This still leaves intact the historical reality of the tomb itself. The immense dome rises directly over the tomb of the first Bishop of Rome, the first Pope. The tomb was originally very modest, but the veneration of centuries has erected over it, in a remarkable sequence of architectural and artistic achievements, the greatest church in Christendom.

II

FRUITFUL RESULTS OF THE HOLY YEAR

But the millions of people, gathered here at the center of Catholicity from the four points of the compass, to take part in this world event of the Holy Year, to gain the Jubilee indulgence, to strengthen themselves in the cleansing of purification and sanctification, to draw with joy, from as close to the source as possible, graces from the Saviour's fountains (Is. 12, 3)—shall they perhaps be satisfied merely to return to their native lands as privileged ones among the hundreds of millions who have not been able to enjoy such a favor? Shall they merely relate to their neighbors the wonderful things they have seen?

Shall they merely seek refuge in these happy memories from the grim realities of life, that were forgotten for a moment? No! Now they must be convinced of the mission which is theirs, an honor and at the same time a responsibility, to become among their

fellow Christians, heralds and propagators of the spirit with which their hearts overflow.

As a tree in the garden of the Father of the Family, the Holy Year has flowered magnificently. And if its flowers, at the year's close, drop their petals to the ground, it is only that the fruit may grow and mature. For it is necessary that this fruit should grow and mature! The world hungers and thirsts for it, while its living conditions, with all the material and spiritual misery involved, are far indeed from giving men the legitimate satisfactions they seek. The needs and anxieties of each day completely absorb the energies of so many hearts, which no longer find time, leisure, or inclination to devote to the things of the spirit even that minimum which is the essential duty of every Christian.

Even in those places where the secular and regular clergy, aided by the whole-hearted collaboration of the laity, have quickened Christian life, even there the number of Christians who are spiritually undernourished, enervated and vacillating in their faith, is such that the Church in her maternal solicitude can not but be concerned.

To arouse these sons of the Church from their easy-going but dangerous lethargy is the urgent task which now confronts the Catholic Apostolate.

OBSTACLES TO THE APOSTOLATE OF THE CHURCH

Every attentive observer who knows how to consider and evaluate the present situation in its concrete reality must be struck by the serious obstacles

which oppose the Apostolate of the Church. Like a mass of molten lava, which gradually flows down the side of a volcano, the destructive tide of the spirit of this world advances threateningly and spreads into every sphere of life and into every class of society.

Its progress and its intensity, as well as its effects, vary from country to country, ranging from a more or less conscious disregard of the social influence of the Church, to a systematic distrust, which under some types of government takes the form of open hostility and downright persecution.

We have full confidence that Our beloved sons and daughters will have the clarity of vision and the courage to face and to fulfill with resolution the responsibilities arising from such a situation. Without harshness, but also without weakness, they will endeavor to dissipate the prejudices and suspicions of not a few who have been deceived, but who are still open to a peaceful argument based on facts, they will convince them that, far from there being any conflict between loyalty to the Church and devotion to the interests and well-being of the people and the state, between these two kinds of duties, which a true Christian must ever keep in mind, there exists an intimate union and perfect harmony.

Here We deliberately pass over in silence some recent discord that has arisen between Catholics and those belonging to other religious groups and which has regrettably found an echo in political discussions. We should like to believe that beyond these no less unpleasant than harmful

controversies there are to be found in all non-Catholic groups men and women of good will who, fully realizing the dangers threatening the sacred heritage of the Christian Faith, cherish in their hearts thoughts of other than those of fraternal dissension and discord.

A NOTABLE ABSENCE

If any one should be tempted to lose sight of this need and duty, let him turn his gaze—as far as this is possible—towards what is happening in some countries that are encircled about, as it were, with a wall of iron, and see to what state they are reduced as regards their spiritual and religious life.

He would there see millions of his Catholic brethren, men and women, linked together by ancient and sacred traditions of fidelity to Christ and of filial union with this Apostolic See; he would see nations whose heroic actions in preserving and defending the Faith are written indelibly in the annals of the Church's history. He would see them, We say, frequently deprived of civil rights and of their personal liberty and security, cut off from every vital, safe and sure means of communicating with the center of Christianity, even in the most intimate matters of conscience; and all the while there weighs on them the anxiety of feeling almost alone and at times of believing that they are abandoned!

Underneath Michaelangelo's dome, where the voice of pilgrims from every free country resounded as they sang in most varied tongues the same expressions of faith and the same hymns of joy, their place was empty. What a

void it was and what a sorrow for the heart of the Common Father and for the hearts of all the faithful united together in the very same belief and in one and the same love. But they, though absent, were, in fact, all the more present when in those countless throngs, conscious of their Catholic faith, there seemed to be but one heart and one soul thus forming a mysterious but very real unity.

To all these confessors of Christ, who are unjustly bound either by visible or invisible fetters, who are suffering contumely for the name of Jesus (Acts 5, 41) at the end of this Holy Year, We gratefully send from Our heart Our paternal greeting. May it reach them notwithstanding the walls of their prisons, and the barbed wire of their concentration and forced labor camps, out there in those far off regions which are shut off from the gaze of free men and over which a veil of silence is drawn, but which will not, however, escape the final judgment of God nor the impartial verdict of history.

In the most sweet Name of Jesus, We exhort them to support generously their sufferings and humiliations with which they make a contribution of inestimable value to the great crusade of prayer and penance which will begin with the extension of the Holy Year to the whole world.

With a magnanimous outpouring of charity in keeping with the example of Christ, the Apostles and the true followers of the Redeemer, may their prayers and Ours include even those who are today amid the ranks of the persecutors.

III

PEACE WITHIN NATIONS

Now, if we look towards the future, the first urgent problem that presents itself is peace within every country. Unfortunately the struggle for life, the concern to earn a living, divides into opposing groups even those who inhabit the same country and are sons of the same fatherland. Those on either side want, and rightly so, to be considered and treated in social life not as mere chattels but as persons with human dignity, especially in matters regarding the state and the national economy.

For this reason We have repeatedly and with ever greater insistence proclaimed the fight against unemployment and the striving after a sound social security as an indispensable condition if all members of a nation, both high and low, are to be united in a single corporate body.

But he who selfishly sees today in the groups that oppose his own personal interests, the source of every difficulty and an obstacle to recovery and progress—how could he dare to flatter himself that he is serving the cause of peace in his country?

Certain organizations, in order to protect the interests of their own members, no longer appeal to the laws of justice and the common good but depend on the organized members of their followers and the weakness of their opponents, who do not happen to be so well organized, or who always strive to subordinate the use of force to the laws of justice and the common good. How can such organizations

dare to flatter themselves that they are promoting the cause of civil peace?

A nation cannot expect to enjoy peace within its own boundaries except on certain conditions. Governors and governed, leaders and followers, must not defend their own social interests and their particular opinions with obstinacy and short-sightedness, but should learn to take a more comprehensive view of things and make their aim the good of all. If it is regretted in some countries that there is a deplorable lack of participation in public life on the part of the younger generation, perhaps the reason is that the younger generation sees too little or too seldom the shining and attractive example of men such as we have described here.

Beneath the surface, then, of unquestionable difficulties in the political and economic sphere, there is hidden a more serious evil of a spiritual and moral character. It is evidenced by the number of men with narrow minds and mean spirits, of egoists and "go-getters," of those who follow fortune's favorites, who let themselves be swayed, whether from illusion or cowardice, by the spectacle of huge mobs, the shouting of opinions, and the intoxication of excitement. Left to themselves, these would not take one step forward, would not, as is the duty of true Christians, advance unwaveringly towards the light of the eternal principles, under the guidance of the Spirit of God and with unshakable faith in His Divine Providence. Herein is to be found the true and deepest source of human misery.

Like a termite in the woodwork of a house, this evil gnaws away at the heart of nations and before it makes its presence known exteriorly, it renders them unfit for their mission in life. Thus the foundations of the industrial and capitalistic system have undergone essential changes, that after a long period of preparation, have been accelerated by the war. Peoples that have known subjection for centuries are winning their way to independence, others who till now have been in a privileged position strive by new means and old to maintain it. The thirst for social security, that is ever growing in intensity and extent, is but a symptom of the present state of society in the various countries, where many things that once seemed traditionally solid have become unreliable and uncertain.

Why, then, does not this common uncertainty and doubt, arising from present circumstances, create a certain solidarity among the peoples in different countries? Is not the interest of employer and employed in this respect identical? Is it not true in every country that industrial and agricultural production are now more than ever linked together on account of the reciprocal influence they exert one upon the other? And you, you who remain insensible to the hardships suffered by the wandering and homeless refugees, should you not have a fellow-feeling for him whose unhappy lot today may well be yours tomorrow?

Why should not this solidarity among all those peoples who are restless and in danger become for all the secure way leading to safety? Why should not this spirit of solidarity be

the basis of the natural social order in its three essentials—the family, property and the state—and make these elements collaborate in one organic whole that is adapted to present conditions? These present conditions are, after all, despite all their inherent difficulties, a gift of God. Why should they not conduce to the strengthening of the Christian spirit?

IV

INTERNATIONAL PEACE

The real danger to international, as well as national, peace is the presence of men who are bereft of this Christian sense. Some have been deceived by the past, others are fanatically bent on attaining some Utopia of the future. In every case, they are dissatisfied with the present.

We do not wish to speak here of a foreign aggressor who is proud of his power and scorns every duty of justice and charity. He finds, however, in national crises and the lack of unity within nations as regards spiritual and moral matters, a powerful weapon and, as it were, an auxiliary force inside the country itself.

It is necessary, then, that nations should not be led by motives of prestige or antiquated ideas, and so create political and economic difficulties against the strengthening of the national forces of other countries, while they ignore or take no thought for the common peril.

It is necessary that they should understand that their natural and most faithful allies are to be found among those countries where Christian

thought, or at least faith in God, have an influence even in public life. They should not make their only consideration some supposed national or political interest that neglects or overlooks profound differences in fundamental concepts of the world and of life.

The reason why We utter these warnings is the ambiguous and irresolute attitude which We see adopted by some true lovers of peace in face of such a grave peril. And because We have at heart the good of all nations, We believe that the close union of all peoples who are masters of their own destiny and who are united by sentiments of reciprocal trust and mutual assistance is the sole means for the defense of peace and the best guarantee of its re-establishment.

Unfortunately, in these past weeks the cleavage which in the external world divides the entire international community into opposite camps grows constantly deeper, placing in jeopardy the peace of the world. Never has the history of mankind known a dissension of greater magnitude. It reaches to the very ends of the earth. If a regrettable conflict should occur today, weapons would prove so destructive as to make the earth "void and empty" (Gen. 1, 2), a desolate chaos, like to a desert over which the sun is not rising, but setting. All nations would be convulsed, and among the citizens of the same country, the conflict would have manifold repercussions. It would place in extreme peril all its civil institutions and spiritual values, seeing that the conflict now embraces all the most difficult problems which normally would be discussed separately.

The grim and threatening danger imperiously demands, by reason of its gravity, that we make the most of every opportune circumstance to bring about the triumph of wisdom and justice under the standard of concord and peace. Let it be used to revive sentiments of goodness and compassion towards all peoples whose one sincere aspiration is to live in peace and tranquility. Let mutual trust, which presupposes sincere intentions and honest discussions, return to rule over international organizations. Away with the barriers! Break down the barbed wire fences! Let each people be free to know the life of other peoples, let that segregation of some countries from the rest of the civilized world, so dangerous to the cause of peace, be abolished.

SOLICITUDE OF THE CHURCH FOR THE PEACE OF THE WORLD

How earnestly the Church desires to smooth the way for these friendly relations among peoples! For her East and West do not represent opposite ideals, but share a common heritage, to which both have generously contributed, and to which both are called to contribute in the future also. By virtue of her Divine Mission she is Mother to all peoples, and a faithful ally and wise guide to all who seek peace.

AN UTTER INJUSTICE

Nevertheless there are some, and they are well known, who accuse Us quite unjustly of wanting war, and of collaborating to this end with "imperialistic" powers, who, they say, place their hopes rather in the power of destructive weapons of war than in

the practice of justice.

What else can We answer to this bitter calumny except: Sift the troubled

12 years of Our Pontificate; weigh every word that Our lips have uttered, every sentence Our pen has written; you will find in them only appeals for peace.

Recall especially the historic month of August, 1939. At a time when the prospect of a disastrous world war was growing ever more terrible, from the banks of Lake Albano We raised Our voice, entreating, in the Name of God, governments and peoples to settle their disputes by mutual and sincere agreements. Nothing is lost by peace, We exclaimed, everything can be lost by war.

Try to consider this with a calm and honest mind, and you must recognize that if in this world, torn by conflicting interests, there is still left any secure haven where the dove of peace can tranquilly come to rest, it is here in this place hallowed by the blood of the Apostles and of the Martyrs; here where the Vicar of Christ knows no duty more sacred, nor mission more gratifying than that of being the unwearied advocate of peace.

Thus We have acted in the past; thus We shall act in the future, for as long as it shall please the Divine Founder of the Church to leave on Our frail shoulders the dignity and

the burden of Supreme Pastor.

INVITATION TO PRAY

The way leading to true peace is long and hard, and impeded by briars and thorns. However, the great majority of men are ready to make the sacrifice in order to be preserved from the catastrophe of new war. Still, the undertaking is so great and merely human means so ineffective, that We turn Our gaze to Heaven and raise Our hands in supplication to Him Who from the Glory of the Divinity came down to our level and became "one of us."

The power of the Saviour, Who moves the hearts of rulers wherever He wills, like the streams of water whose course He regulates (Cf. Prov. 21, 1), can still the tempest that tosses the bark, when not only the companions of Peter are alarmed, but the whole human race. However, it is the sacred duty of the Church's children to implore with their prayers and sacrifices the Lord of the World, Jesus Christ, God blessed forever (Rom. 9, 5), to command the winds and the sea, and grant to harassed humanity the great calm (Matt. 8, 26) of true peace.

With these sentiments We impart from Our heart to you, beloved sons and daughters, and to all who listen to Our voice throughout the world, the Apostolic Benediction.

