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ADP 4364

1967
Christmas Message

1968
New Year's Day Message

Prayer For Peace

POPE PAUL VI

UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Christmas Message

December 23, 1967

Brothers, sons, friends, all men of good will:

Christmas once again proposes for our consideration the theme of peace. And the message which this holy season places on our lips for you and for the world cannot pass over in silence the wish of peace which Christ brought to this earth of ours, so avid for peace and so in need of it, yet so fraught with ever more serious and fearsome offenses and menaces which seem to compromise peace.

Allow us, brothers, to repeat in our Christmas greeting that same wish which descended from heaven during the mysterious night of the birth of Jesus Christ here among us, on the soil of our earth, this small atom in the universe, and, at the precise moment that comprises our history, in the immense flow of thousands of centuries.

It is to us men, the privileged beings of the cosmos because we are marked with the image and likeness of God, that peace was announced, as a gift crowning all the other gifts granted to us together with this present life, and giving to life its value and its motive for being worthily and happily lived.

Peace to all of you, brothers, who enjoy the creative and redemptive benevolence of God. Peace on this blessed day which, since it is dedicated to the birth of life, to the life of Christ, the first-born of all creation,¹ and prototype of the human race, sheds its transfiguring light upon every day of our time, and upon every member of the human family. Peace to you, all men, whom we sincerely love, each and every one of you, in Christ. And to you

especially who, by faith and love, belong to that people whom a most tender yet most grave command obliges us, and even in a certain sense enables us, to love as ours and to guide as Christ's peace, peace to all.

But while this wish, so simple yet so full of meaning, rises from our heart, a number of weighty and difficult questions come to trouble it: After all, what is peace? why, if it is so closely linked with the perfection of our existence, must it always be sought for as a lacking or insufficient element? Are words of good wishes enough to create peace in our day-to-day experience, or does it not demand, as we all realize, many other factors besides fine courteous words, in order that peace be real and lasting? How then can be it secured, how maintained, how can peace be made the stable adornment, characteristic of a civilization like ours of today, which claims to be advanced and mature?

We raise these questions so that, on this its feastday, peace may be meditated upon, even if such meditation should come to a bitter conclusion—and unfortunately many, whether from instinct or logic, draw such a conclusion—namely, that it is impossible to attain peace, much less preserve it and make it bring forth ever more orderly developments. If this were so, wishes for peace would be a mockery, would almost provoke us to pessimism and despair. But today the conclusion reached by such meditation is quite different, because the Saviour, Christ “our peace”² has come into the world to give us His peace,³ to pour forth among us His spirit, whose primary gift is peace:⁴ where Christ is, there is peace of soul. Such is the wish of the Apostle Paul: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”⁵ Where His Gospel is welcomed, peace is at least virtually ensured, not only by a promulgation of intention, but also by a mysterious energy which stimulates peace of soul, brings it forth, transforms it from a need into a duty, from a desire into a gift and a wise ability to generate and enjoy peace.

This simple reflection leads to the thought which should characterize our fraternal Christmas message, and it is this: We speak often, very often, of peace—indeed, we have just invited the world to dedicate a special thought to peace in human comity on

the first day of the civil year (and this theme deserves to be repeated here, for the threatening condition of the world imposes it at every moment). As all are aware, however, we usually speak of peace between nations, between classes of society, between the members of the human community. We talk of external peace, political, military, social, communitarian peace, which concerns the right balance in relationships between men. Today, however, inspired by the spirituality of Christmas. We would invite you to consider another peace, that interior personal peace which every human spirit should have, or yearn for, within itself, as the light of its conscience, as the orderly command of its faculties, as the synthesis and superior expression of its personality, and as the deepest fruitful root of exterior peace.

We mean: peace of heart: true self-possession, true origin of virtue, serenity and happiness, true source of wise and good speech in its strongest and most intelligent expression.

Brothers, do we possess peace of heart?

The answer to this question is undoubtedly difficult. Perhaps we would like to escape it as being an indiscreet query, or discredit it by assimilating peace of heart to the passive resignation of one who, convinced of his own weakness and lacking in courageous energy, puts his mind at peace, thus abandoning himself to a sort of invincible fatalism, which is a false imitation of true peace of soul. Sometimes noble and thoughtful men would derive it from the higher school of stoicism, which throws off the immediate experience of disturbing passions and worrisome events in order to accept, freely and enforcedly at the same time, the profound reality of the laws of nature, a stoicism which considers a manly and serene insensibility to disagreeable contingent things to be peace of heart.

There is indeed a wide scale of various forms of spurious peace of heart in modern life, which serve to placate the intimate demands of human thought, disappointed in its search for truth, and of human love, disappointed in its search for true happiness, by substituting for them either indifference to the things of the soul, or the narcotic of a subtle scepticism, or the breathless engagement in

feverish external activities, excluding any thoughtful meditation upon the true destiny of man, or else, unfortunately, by substituting the quest for refined experiences of pleasure, or the sophisticated affectation of contempt for every form of well-bred social coexistence.

Is this peace of heart? Our answer must unfortunately be no. In general, modern man lacks true interior peace.

We have such great esteem and love for man, as Christ teaches, that we would always willingly presume that in every human mind there lies hidden a profound connatural aspiration, a nostalgia, a hope of enjoying one day real peace of heart: that true, new peace, which redeems us from our common misery and makes us feel that we are indeed men and sons of God.

So, then, we wish to announce in a loud voice, without entering into explanations rendered almost unnecessary by this feast of Christmas, or rather, we proclaim with a quiet voice which penetrates gently and persuasively into men's minds, that peace of heart does exist, it is possible, it is near at hand, and today it is offered to us as the great gift of Christmas. Indeed, this is our wish, this today is our message.

Who will receive it? To whom in particular is it addressed? We proclaim it thus: Peace to you who suffer, for you can be consoled. Peace to you who hunger both for bread and for justice, for men have been declared by Christ to be brothers,⁶ and hence all those who can are obliged to give you the material and moral food you need. Peace to you who meditate and study, for truth does exist, and the drama of your sleepless research may discover marvelous solutions: all things come from the word of God, and so all things are, at least in a measure, intelligible. Peace to you who bear the anxious burden of the right government of the world, for it is not vain to hope that at last men will realize that they can and must love one another, and not arm themselves to the point of fatal risks, not fight one another, and not kill each other.

At this point, brothers, you become aware of a simple and wonderful thing: namely, that to a great extent external peace

derives from and depends upon interior peace. Peace must be in men's hearts before it can be made real in civil institutions and the events of history. The road may be long, because the ways of the heart are long and often rough and difficult. They are individual and changeable, it is true, but it is this that constitutes the drama of man, which Christmas comes to enrich with positive and, considered in themselves, resolute energies.

In fact, peace is a kind of orderliness, and order presupposes a perfection of relationships. Among all those which are necessary for human existence, there is also, first and indispensable, the relationship with God. We know we are now asserting a truth which many men of today refuse to admit: you can live well without religion. They say, you can even live better. Religion is so mysterious, it poses extremely complex problems, it does not give peace to man's mind but takes it away. This is not so, brothers: we have an insatiable need of God, we cannot do without Him, our very life is by its nature dependent on Him. To forget God means to put out light in our lives, for without Him all becomes dark. God is necessary for the human spirit, God is our happiness, God is life. To be united to Him, reconciled with Him, observant of the plan of His holy will—therein is our primary interior peace. Holy Scripture says "there is no peace for those who are without God."⁷ But there is peace for whoever enters into the divine will: "In his will is our peace," in the beautiful and true words of Dante at the beginning of his Paradise.⁸ We are well aware of how strongly this first foundation of interior peace, and consequently of external peace as well, is opposed today. Religion, in its positive and active sense, is refused citizenship, not only in the kingdom of Caesar where Caesar is sovereign, and where laicism may actually be a dutiful recognition of the limits of temporal government at the frontier of the kingdom of God, but even in the realm of the spirit, in which religion is called upon to assert its own kingdom, a source of interior peace and, thereby, of external peace also.

How can one think of a social international order without relying upon a personal moral order in those men who govern the world or are its components? How can such a personal moral order

be sincere, secure and stable, without reference to those absolute transcendental principles which religion alone inspires and guarantees? Peace with God is the source of that moral strength, that manly righteousness and fundamental wisdom, from which there may spring forth peace with men. How can one discover the art of getting men to agree without recognizing the primacy of human brotherhood in politics, without recognizing forgiveness of wrongs undergone or shared as the principle which solves human conflicts? Are not these the basic criteria of earthly peace, founded as they are on teachings which only religion can suggest and maintain? We mean, the religion of Christ and of Christmas. And we say no more, since these words of ours are not a lesson, but a message of good wishes.

Perhaps this message may prove to be prophetic. May God grant it, in the twofold perspective that this humble voice of ours, a weak echo of the Christmas annunciation, may one day be listened to, and bring joy and new vitality to a world brought nearer to Christ. And that good believing souls, from now on, filled with the spirit of Christ, may experience the ineffable consolation of His interior peace, telling themselves and witnessing to their brothers how true, how joyful, how hopeful is the peace which Christ has brought us, which without Him the world cannot fully attain.⁹

To you, then, brothers, to you, beloved sons, to you, all men of good will, goes our Christmas wish to that interior peace of God, which passes all understanding, (to) keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus,¹⁰ in whose name we bless you with all our heart.

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¹ Col. 1:15.

² Eph. 2:14.

³ Cf. John 14:27.

⁴ Dv. Gal. 5:22.

⁵ Co. 3:15.

⁶ Matt. 23:8.

⁷ Cf. Is. 48:22; 55:21.

⁸ III, 85.

⁹ Cf. John 14:27.

¹⁰ Phil. 4:8.

Message on Peace

Day of Peace

January 1, 1968

Brothers and Sons! All men who hear our voice!

Peace! Peace! is our announcement. Peace! Peace! in the New Year is our fervent wish. Peace to you present here today, citizens of Rome, which expressed and confirmed its civilization by its "*Pax Romana*," founded upon the universal extension of the equality of rights of its citizens, who were proudly free through the dynamic wisdom of Rome's juridical ordinances—be conscious and worthy of so great a heritage! Peace also to you, guests of Rome, visitors, pilgrims, who have come here from Italy and from all other countries, and who are associated here, not as strangers but as friends, at this fraternal affirmation of a high, universally shared human sentiment! And peace to all those who have welcomed our invitation to dedicate to the high ideal of peace this first day of the civil year, to make this day, as it were, the hope and pledge of every day and every activity of the time to come. We thank you all, especially you, the guides of nations, the magistrates of justice, the professors and seekers of truth and culture, the veterans whose physical and moral scars, inflicted on your flesh and your spirit by recent wars, help you to know better than others how great a conquest is peace, you also, the young, the workers, the ordinary folk so sincere and intuitive in regard to the true good of modern society—we thank you all for your adherence to this general celebration of peace.

Wherever that blessed word is heard today, we send our fraternal and fatherly greeting and our good wishes for peace and for all those things which peace implies: order, serenity, joy, fraternity, freedom, hope, the energy and security of good work, the resolution to begin anew and to progress, the healthy welfare of all, and that mysterious ability to enjoy life by discovering its relationships with its inmost principle and its supreme end: the God of peace.

This should conclude our words, for the present, concerning this immense and formidable theme.

However, merely by pronouncing and repeating this prophetic word peace, so supremely human and friendly, a sentiment arises in our spirit which we cannot pass over in silence, especially because it tries to smother our cry of peace, and disappoint, as it were, the hope which accompanies it. This sentiment is the feeling of the difficulties which oppose the securing of peace. The very present conditions of the world reveal and impose these difficulties with an energy which seems to proclaim them as fatal and insuperable. As an example, peace today does not exist in a region which is materially distant from us but spiritually very near. You know well that we are alluding to Vietnam; and while, from the dispassionate analysis of the civil interests in question and of the honor of the conflicting parties, it seems to us that the way of peace, even though complex and gradual, is still open and possible, behold new, terrible obstacles arise to complicate, with new problems and new threats, this intricate question, increasing dangers, rancors, ruins, tears and victims.

We would wish to ward off the tremendous disaster of a spreading war, an endless war. We dare to exhort the powers involved in the conflict to attempt every possible means that could lead to an honorable solution of the sorrowful dispute. The same entreaty we place before international bodies which might be able to intervene. And today again we beg the parties in conflict to establish a sincere and lasting truce in the civil struggle which is so grave and merciless. It is not perhaps desirable by all, and is it not perhaps possible in a practical way that fair negotiations might reestablish peace between the inhabitants of that beloved and noble

country, guaranteeing their independence and liberty? We think so. We hope so "*in spe, contra spem,*" hoping against hope.

In this hope we are cheered by the prolongation by some hours of the truce previously fixed for this New Year, in accordance with the spirit of our call for a Day of Peace: a small sign, purely symbolic as it were, but very gracious and meaningful, and one that to us, as without doubt to all, is greatly pleasing, as a presage of happier issues.

This very sad example of Vietnam is sufficient to show how difficult peace is, even when it might be attained. Peace becomes difficult when the struggle is an ideological one. In such circumstances, the situation is aggravated by confusion of judgment and opinion. The world looks on, is aroused, deplures, comments, trying to understand on which side justice lies; and, because of the difficulty of finding the correct solution, feels a growing temptation to relegate peace among the other Utopias as a great ideal, worthy of being included among the finest energies motivating history, but fated always to remain fallacious.

This aspect of peace, namely, the difficulty of attaining and preserving it, is the aspect that primarily stirs us to speak of it, and constrains us to declare, even if it is against all appearances, that peace is possible, always; that peace is a duty, always. It is from this confidence, from this duty, that our campaign for peace is possible, because men are basically good, are orientated toward reason, order and the common good; it is possible because it is in the heart of the new men, of youth, of people who are perceptive of the path of civilization; it is possible, because it is called for by the dearest voices, those of the children, those of the victims of the conflicts of mankind, the wounded, the refugees, the ravaged, those of the weeping mothers, of the widows, and of the fallen; voices which all together implore peace, peace! Yes, it is possible, because Christ has come into the world, He has proclaimed universal brotherhood and has taught us love.

Admittedly it is difficult, because, before it is found in external events and arrangements, peace must be found in men's

minds, which harbor selfishness, pride, dreams of power and domination, the ideology of exclusivism, of oppression, of rebellion with thirst for vengeance and blood.

Brothers and sons, it is to this overcoming of inhuman ideas, of arrogant instincts and warlike passions, that the Day of Peace is dedicated; and it is to the formation of hearts that are strong in goodness and in the awareness that all men are brothers, that human life is sacred, that generosity in forgiving and the capacity for reconciliation are a great social and political art, that our effort for the victory of peace is directed.

What can our effort achieve? Is not this too one more vain attempt which increases the number of the unsuccessful endeavors? So it would be, brothers and sons, if a higher assistance, that of God, the good and merciful Father, did not inspire and sustain it. That is the aid that prayer can obtain and insert into the complications of human conflicts in order to resolve them in an unexpectedly auspicious manner.

To prayer then do we invite you, to prayer with one voice and one heart alone, for peace in the world.

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Prayer for Peace

Day of Peace

January 1, 1968

O Lord, the God of peace, You Who have created men and show them Your benevolence so that they may share as sons in your Glory, we bless You and we give thanks to You because You have sent us Jesus, Your well-beloved Son, and through the mystery of His Resurrection You have made Him the worker of all salvation, the source of all peace, and bond of all brotherhood.

We give thanks to You for the desires, the efforts, the achievements stirred up by Your spirit of peace in our time to replace hate by love, mistrust by understanding, indifference by interdependence.

Open our minds and our hearts ever wider to the real demands of the love of all our brothers, so that we may become more completely peacemakers.

Remember, O Father of mercy, all those who struggle, suffer and die to bring forth a world of closer brotherhood.

May your kingdom of justice, of peace and of love come to men of every race and every tongue and may the earth be filled with Your glory! Amen.

