



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

XXXVII WORLD DAY OF PEACE **HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II** Thursday, 1 January 2004

1. "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (Gal 4: 4). Today, the liturgy of the Octave of Christmas presents to us the *icon of the Mother of God*, the Virgin Mary. The Apostle Paul points her out as the "woman" through whom the Son of God entered the world. Mary of Nazareth is the *Theotokos*, the One who "gave birth to the King of Heaven and earth for ever" (*Entrance Antiphon*; cf. *Sedulius*). At the beginning of this new year, let us place ourselves with docility at the school of Mary. We want to learn from her, the Holy Mother, *how to accept in faith and prayer the salvation* that God never ceases to offer to all who trust in his merciful love.

2. In this atmosphere of listening and prayer, *let us give thanks to God* for this New Year: may it be *a year of prosperity and peace* for everyone! With these wishes, I am pleased to address a respectful thought to the distinguished Ambassadors of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See who are present at today's celebration. I cordially greet Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, and my collaborators in the Secretariat of State. With them, I greet Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino and all the members of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. I am grateful to them for their concerted effort to extend everywhere the invitation to peace that the Church constantly proclaims.

3. "An ever timely commitment: teaching peace": this is the theme of the [Message for today's World Day of Peace](#). It is ideally linked to what I proposed at the beginning of my Pontificate when I reasserted the urgent need to *form consciences to the culture of peace*. For peace to be *possible*, I wished to repeat, it is also a *duty* (cf. [Message](#), n. 4). Challenged by situations of injustice and violence that threaten various parts of the globe and the never-ending wars, often ignored by public opinion, it is becoming more and more necessary *to build roads to peace together; consequently, educating for peace* becomes indispensable. For Christians, in fact, "to proclaim peace is to announce Christ who is 'our peace' (Eph 2: 14); it is to announce his Gospel, which is a 'Gospel of peace' (Eph 6: 15); it is to call all people to the beatitude of being 'peacemakers' (cf. Mt 5: 9)" ([Message](#), n. 3). Archbishop Michael Aidan Courtney, my representative as Apostolic Nuncio in Burundi who was tragically killed a few days ago as he carried out his mission encouraging dialogue and reconciliation, was also a witness to the "Gospel of peace". Let us pray for him and hope that his example and his sacrifice will bear fruits of peace in Burundi and throughout the world.

4. Every year in this Christmas season *we return in spirit to Bethlehem* to adore the Child lying in the manger. Unfortunately, in the land in which Jesus was born tragic conditions endure. In other parts of the world, hotbeds of violence and conflict are also still smouldering. However, we must persevere *without giving in to the temptation to despair*. All are asked to make an effort to see that the fundamental rights of the person are respected, by constantly teaching respect for the law. With this in mind, it is necessary to strive to transcend "the logic of simple *justice* and to be open also to the logic of *forgiveness*". Indeed, "there is no peace without forgiveness!" (cf. [Message](#), n. 10). People are becoming more and more aware of the need for *a new international order* that will make the most of the experience of the United Nations Organization and the results it has achieved in recent years: an order that can provide satisfactory solutions to the problems of our day, founded on the

*dignity of the human person, on an integral development of society, on solidarity between the rich and poor countries and on sharing resources and the extraordinary results of scientific and technological progress.*⁵ "Love is... the loftiest and most noble form of relationship possible between human beings" (*ibid.*). The awareness of this guided me in drafting the [Message for today's World Day of Peace](#). May God help us build together the "civilization of love". Only a humanity in which love is triumphant will be able to enjoy authentic and lasting peace. *May Mary obtain this gift for us. May she sustain us and accompany us in the arduous but exalting process of building peace. Let us never tire of praying confidently for this: Mary Queen of Peace, pray for us!* © Copyright 2004 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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