



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN XXIII FOR PEACE

Venerable brethren, beloved sons: The Apostle Peter in his speech to those who had come together in the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius declares that all the nations of the earth without distinction are henceforth invited to consider the universal fatherhood of God; and he sums up this heavenly doctrine in the message of peace: "preaching peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36). This same message is the very pulsation of Our heart, the heart of a father and of a Bishop of Holy Church; it comes more eagerly to Our lips whenever the clouds seem to gather darkly on the horizon. We have before Us the memory of the Popes who most closely preceded Us, whose outspoken manifestations of solicitude and anxious appeals have passed into history. From the exhortation of Pius X when the first European conflagration was imminent—a few days before his saintly death—(cf. A.A.S. VI, 1914, p. 373), to the Encyclical of Benedict XV, *Pacem Dei munus pulcherrimum* (cf. A.A.S. XII, 1920, pp. 209 ss.); from the warning call of Pius XI which looked to true peace "not as written into treaties but rather as sealed in the hearts of men" (cf. the bull "Infinita Dei," May 29, 1924; cf. A.A.S. XVI, 1942, p. 213), to that fervent last appeal of Pius XII on the 24th of August 1939: "It is by the power of sound reason, not by force of arms, that justice makes its way" (cf. Pius XII *Discorsi e Radiomessagi*, I, 1939, p. 306), we have a whole series of pleadings, sometimes deeply sorrowful and moving but always paternal, calling upon the whole world to guard against the danger while there is yet time, and assuring the nations that whereas everything is lost, and lost to everyone, through war, nothing will be lost through peace. We make this appeal Our own, extending it once more to those who bear on their conscience the gravest weight of public and acknowledged responsibilities. The Church by her very nature cannot remain indifferent to human suffering, even were it no more than anxiety and anguish. And this is the reason why We call upon the rulers of nations to face squarely the tremendous responsibilities they bear before the tribunal of history, and what is more before the judgment seat of God, and We entreat them not to fall victims to false and deceiving provocations. It is truly upon wise men that the issue depends: that force shall not prevail, but right, through free and sincere negotiations; that truth and justice shall be vindicated by safeguarding the essential liberties and the insuppressible values of every nation and of every human person. Though We are far from exaggerating the importance of what has, up to now, only the appearance—but We must say the too irresponsible and tragically deplorable appearance—of a threat of war, as reported in the sources of daily public information, it is quite natural that We should make Our own the anxious solicitude of Our Predecessors and present it as a sacred warning to all Our children, as We feel it Our right and Our duty to call them, to all who believe in God and in His Christ, and even to unbelievers since all men belong to God and to Christ by right of origin and redemption. Those two pillars of the Church, Saints Peter and Paul, give us the warning. The former does this in his affirmation, several times repeated, of peace in Christ the Son of God; and the latter, the Doctor of the Gentiles, in a very detailed indication of counsels and instructions which are for that

matter timely and appropriate for all who hold or will hold any post of responsibility in the course of human generations."I have no more to say, brethren, except this; draw your strength from the Lord, from that mastery which his power supplies. It is not against flesh and blood that we enter the lists; we have to do with principedoms and powers, with those who have mastery of the world in these dark days, with malign influences in an order higher than ours."Possessing the wisdom and the fullness of fatherhood as the humble successor of St. Peter and custodian of the Deposit of Faith—which remains always the great Divine Book open to all men of all nations—and consequently also the keeper of Christ's Gospel, We deem it opportune to offer some personal concrete reflections on the present world situation insofar as it gives rise to uncertainty and fear. Following the counsel of St. Paul in regard to the attitude to be taken towards the evil spirits in an order higher than ours, we should note the interesting description he makes of the good fighter poised to meet the assault of his adversary. "Stand fast, your loins girt with truth, the breastplate of justice fitted on, and your feet shod in readiness to publish the gospel of peace, the 'Evangelium pacis'. With all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fire-tipped arrows of your wicked enemy; make the helmet of salvation your own, and the sword of the spirit, God's word."All these are spiritual weapons described in figures of speech by means of which, beloved brethren and children, you can discern indications of what can be and what ought to be the attitude of a good Christian in the face of any event, at any time and under any circumstances. That which comes from the Evil One and from unbridled natural inclinations is a war of the spirit—a continuous warfare—and always the hideous fire that can penetrate and destroy everything. Therefore, it is through the guidance of the Apostle of the Gentiles that We are led to the clearest and most solid foundation upon which must be based the attitude of the Christian spirit in the face of whatever Providence may dispose or permit. Between two words, war or peace, are entwined the anguish and the hopes of the world, the anxieties and the joy of individual and social life. He who cannot forget the history of the more or less distant past, years filled with afflictions and now recorded in old books, and still has a vivid recollection of the bloodstained half century between 1914 and the present, and remembers the sufferings of our peoples and our lands—even if there were peaceful interludes between one tribulation and the next—trembles at the thought of what could happen to each one of us and to the whole world. Every war brings upheaval and destruction to persons, regions and the entire world. What could happen specially now with the frightful effects of new weapons of destruction and ruin which human ingenuity continues to multiply to everyone's loss? In Our youth We were always deeply moved by that ancient cry of despair which, when the army of Charlemagne first appeared on the Alps, Desiderius, the king of the Lombards, gave out while rending his hair: "The sword, alas, the sword". What should be said of the modern implements of war derived from the secrets of nature and capable of unleashing unheard-of energy to wreak havoc and destruction? By the mercy of God, We are persuaded that up until the present time there is no serious threat of either immediate or remote war. In making this reference of our Own to a subject that the press of all nations is discussing, We mean nothing more than to take still another opportunity of appealing with confidence to the serene and sure wisdom of all men who guide the nations of the world. While it is true that at the end of his letter to the Ephesians written in a prison in Rome where he was chained to a Roman soldier guarding him, the Apostle Paul was inspired by military weapons to teach Christians the arms necessary to defend themselves against, and to gain victory over, spiritual enemies, still it is not surprising that at the end of the list of weapons, he stresses prayer as the most effective of them all. Listen to his words: "galeam salutis adsumite et gladium spiritus, quod est verbum Dei; per omnem orationem et obsecrationem orantes omni tempore in spiritu et in ipso vigilantes in omni instantia et obsecratione pro omnibus sanctis": "Use every kind of prayer and supplication; pray at all times in the Holy Spirit; keep awake to that end with all perseverance; offer your supplication for all the saints" (Eph. 6:17-18). With this earnest invitation the Doctor of the Gentiles brings us to the particular purpose of our being united here today in spirit in a gathering that a mere hint has been sufficient to bring about

and which has resulted in a great uplifting of spirit towards order and peace. The children of the Catholic Church well know this aspiration and this invocation. In days of sorrow the worldwide prayer to Almighty God, Creator of the Universe, to His Son Jesus Christ, made man for man's salvation, and to the Holy Spirit, Lord and Lifegiver, has received from heaven and upon earth wonderful answers, which are recorded as happy and glorious pages in the history of mankind and of individual nations. We must open our hearts and empty them of the malice with which at times the spirit of error and evil seeks to infect them, and thus purified, we must lift them up confident of receiving heaven's blessings as also prosperity in the things of earth. Venerable brothers and beloved children, our simple and spontaneous meeting together in spirit today could well be—who knows?—the first of a series of assemblies of peace, not marred by pointless clamoring, but gladdened by a heartfelt sentiment of elevation and peace, an assurance of the tranquillity and nobility of life in the happiness of Christian society, which is, in Christ, divine brotherhood and a foretaste of the joys of heaven. Reflect that the Catholic Church scattered throughout the world, today, alas, troubled and divided, is preparing: for a universal gathering—the Ecumenical Council—which is aimed at the promotion of that true brotherhood of the nations which exalts Christ Jesus, the glorious and immortal King of ages and of peoples; light of the world, and way, truth and life (cf. 1 Tim. 1:17; John 8:12; 14:6). This afternoon, during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Blood of Jesus Christ has come down upon us, upon our lives, upon our souls. By it we are sanctified and redeemed and lifted up with joy. We have prayed together and in so doing we have felt great joy in our hearts. Let us continue to pray in this way, as St. Paul invites us to do at the end of his touching letter. Let us pray with one another and for one another, and for all the scattered creatures of God who make up the Holy Church and the human family, which is also all His own. We would extend our most urgent invitation to prayer to priests, to consecrated souls, to the innocent and to the suffering. Let us all together beg the Father of light and of grace to enlighten the minds and move the wills of those who hold the chief responsibility for the life or death of the peoples; let us pray for the peoples themselves that they may not allow themselves to be dazzled by exacerbated nationalism and destructive rivalry, and that, as We so earnestly exhorted in Our Encyclical "[Mater et Magistra](#)", the relationships in the life of human society may be reintegrated in truth, in justice and in love. Let us all pray that by means of the penetration of the Christian spirit morality may grow strong: the vigorous strength of Christian families, the source of noble power and dignity and of blessed and joyful prosperity. Ever and always let us pray for the peace of Christ here below, between all men of good will: "that all the families of the nations, rent asunder by the wound of sin, may be subjected to the most gentle rule of Christ." And finally we turn to you, O blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus and our Mother also. How can we, with trembling hearts, apply ourselves to this greatest problem of life or death, which overshadows all mankind, without relying on your intercession to keep us safe from all dangers? This is your hour, Mary; to you Jesus entrusted us in the final moment of His sacrifice of blood. We are confident in your intercession. On the Eighth of September Holy Church kept the feast of your most happy birthday, hailing it as the first beginning of the world's salvation and the growth of peace. This indeed, is what we beg of you, most loving Mother and Queen of all the world. The world has no need of victorious wars and defeated peoples, but of the renewed strength of salvation and of the fruitfulness and calm of peace: this is its need and this it is for which it cries aloud: "salutis exordium; et pacis incrementum"; "the dawn of salvation and growth of peace. Amen. Amen."