



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS

POPE PAUL VI

FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF A

DAY OF PEACE

1 JANUARY 1968

We address Ourselves to all men of good will to exhort them to celebrate "The Day of Peace", throughout the world, on the first day of the year, January 1, 1968. It is Our desire that then, every year, this commemoration be repeated as a hope and as a promise, at the beginning of the calendar which measures and outlines the path of human life in time, that Peace with its just and beneficent equilibrium may dominate the development of events to come.

We think that this proposal interprets the aspirations of peoples, of their governments, of international organisms which strive to preserve Peace in the world, of those religious institutions so interested in the promotion of Peace, of cultural, political and social movements which make Peace their ideal; of youth, whose perspicacity regarding the new paths of civilization, dutifully oriented toward its peaceful developments is more lively; of wise men who see how much, today, Peace is both necessary and threatened. The proposal to dedicate to Peace the first day of the new year is not intended, therefore, as exclusively ours, religious, that is, Catholic. It would hope to have the adherence of all the true friends of Peace, as if it were their own initiative, to be expressed in a free manner, congenial to the particular character of those who are aware of how beautiful and how important is the harmony of all voices in the world for the exaltation of this primary good, which is Peace, in the varied concert of modern humanity.

The Catholic Church, with the intention of service and of example, simply wishes to "launch the idea", in the hope that it may not only receive the widest consent of the civilized world, but that such an idea may find everywhere numerous promoters, able and capable of impressing on the "Day of Peace", to be celebrated on the first day of every new year, that sincere and strong character of conscious humanity, redeemed from its sad and fatal bellicose conflicts, which will

give to the history of the world a more happy, ordered and civilized development.

The Catholic Church will call the attention of its children to the duty of observing "The Day of Peace" with the religious and moral expressions of the Christian faith; but it considers it its duty to remind all those who agree on the opportuneness of such a "Day", some points which ought to characterize it. First among these is: the necessity of defending Peace in the face of dangers which always threaten it: the danger of the survival of selfishness in the relations among nations; the danger of violence into which some populations can allow themselves to be drawn by desperation at not having their right to life and human dignity recognized and respected; the danger, today tremendously increased, of recourse to frightful weapons of extermination, which some nations possess, spending enormous financial means, the expenditure of which is reason for painful reflexion in the presence of the grave needs which hinder the development of so many other peoples; the danger of believing that international controversies can not be resolved by the ways of reason, that is, by negotiations founded on law, justice, and equity, but only by means of deterrent and murderous forces.

The subjective foundation of Peace is a new spirit which must animate coexistence between peoples, a new outlook on man, his duties and his destiny. Much progress must still be made to render this outlook universal and effective; a new training must educate the new generations to reciprocal respect between nations, to brotherhood between peoples, to collaboration between races, with a view also to their progress and development. The international organizations which have been set up for this purpose must be supported by all, become better known, and be provided with the authority and means fit for their great mission. The "Peace Day" must honour these institutions and surround their work with prestige, with confidence, and with that sense of expectation that will keep alive in them the realization of their most serious responsibility, and keep strong the consciousness of the charge which has been entrusted to them.

A warning must be kept in mind. Peace cannot be based on a false rhetoric of words which are welcomed because they answer to the deep, genuine aspirations of humanity, but which can also serve, and unfortunately have sometimes served, to hide the lack of true spirit and of real intentions for peace, if not indeed to mask sentiments and actions of oppression and party interests. Nor can one rightly speak of peace where no recognition or respect is given to its solid foundations: namely, sincerity, justice and love in the relations between states, and, within the limits of each nation, in the relations of citizens with each other and with their rulers; freedom of individuals and of peoples, in all its expressions, civic, cultural, moral, and religious; otherwise, it is not peace which will exist - even if, perchance, oppression is able to create the external appearance of order and legality - but an unceasing and insuppressible growth of revolt and war.

It is, therefore, to true Peace, to just and balanced Peace, in the sincere recognition of the rights of the human person and of the independence of the individual nations, that We invite men of wisdom and strength to dedicate this Day.

Accordingly, in conclusion, it is to be hoped that the exaltation of the ideal of Peace may not favour the cowardice of those who fear it may be their duty to give their life for the service of their own country and of their own brothers, when these are engaged in the defence of justice and liberty, and who seek only a flight from their responsibility, from the risks that are necessarily involved in the accomplishment of great duties and generous exploits. Peace is not pacifism; it does not mask a base and slothful concept of life, but it proclaims the highest and most universal values of life: truth, justice, freedom, love.

It is for the protection of these values that We place them beneath the banner of Peace, and that We invite men and nations to raise, at the dawn of the new year, this banner which must guide the ship of civilization through the inescapable storms of history to the harbour of its highest destiny.

To you, Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
to you, beloved sons, faithful children of our
Holy Catholic Church,

We extend the invitation which We have already announced: that of dedicating to thoughts and resolutions of Peace a special observance on the first day of the civil year, January the first of the coming year. Such an observance must not change the liturgical calendar, which reserves New Year's Day for veneration of the divine motherhood of Mary and the most holy Name of Jesus; indeed, those holy and loving religious remembrances must shed their light of goodness, wisdom and hope upon the prayer for, the meditation upon, and the fostering of the great and yearned-for gift of Peace, of which the world has so much need.

You will have noted, Venerable Brothers and beloved sons, how often Our words have renewed considerations and exhortations upon the theme of Peace; this We do, not giving way to a facile habit, nor taking advantage of the mere interesting topic of the moment; but because We believe this is demanded by Our duty as universal Pastor; because We see Peace to be threatened so seriously and with intimations of terrible events, which may prove catastrophic for entire nations, and perhaps even for a great part of mankind; because, during the latest years of our century's history it has finally become clearly evident that Peace is the only true direction of human progress - and not the tensions caused by ambitious nationalisms, nor conquests by violence, nor repressions which serve as mainstay for a false civil order - We do so because Peace is part and parcel of the Christian religion, since for a Christian to proclaim peace is the same as to announce Jesus Christ: "He is our peace" (*Eph. ii. 14*) and His good news is "the Gospel of peace" (*Eph. vi. 15*).

Through His Sacrifice on the Cross, He brought about universal reconciliation, and we, as His followers, are called to be "peacemakers" (*Mt. v. 9*). In fine, it is only from the Gospel that there can spring forth true Peace, not in order to make men dull and soft, but to replace the impulses to violence and bullying in their minds, by the manly virtues of reasoning and heart characteristic of

true humanism. We do so, finally, because We would not wish ever to be rebuked by God and by history for having kept silence in the face of the danger of a new conflagration between peoples, which, as all know, could take on sudden forms of apocalyptic awfulness.

Men must always speak of Peace. The world must be educated to love Peace, to build it up and defend it. Against the resurgent preludes to war (nationalistic competition, armaments, revolutionary provocations, racial hatred, the spirit of revenge, etc.), and also against the snares of tactical pacifism, intended to drug the enemy one must overcome, to smother in men's minds the meaning of justice, of duty and of sacrifice - we must arouse in the men of our time and of future generations the sense and love of Peace founded upon truth, justice, freedom and love (cf. Pope John XXIII: "*Pacem in terris*").

Let, then, the grand idea of Peace, particularly for us, the disciples of Christ, have its solemn Day, the beginning of the new year 1968.

We who believe in the Gospel can pour into this observance a wonderful treasury of original and powerful ideas, such as that of the intangible world-wide brotherhood of all men, derived from the one, sovereign, most lovable Fatherhood of God, and arising from the communion which, whether really or hopefully, unites all of us with Christ, as well as from the prophetic vocation which, in the Holy Spirit, calls the human race to unity, not only in conscience, but in works and in final destiny. From the Gospel's precept to pardon and to have mercy, we can draw forces which will regenerate society. And above all. Venerable Brothers and beloved sons, we can possess a singular weapon for Peace, that is, prayer, with all its marvellous energies to raise moral tone and to invoke transcendent divine forces of spiritual and political renewal, and also the opportunity offered to each and every one to question himself interiorly and sincerely concerning the roots of rancour and violence which may lurk deep in his heart.

Let us strive, then, to inaugurate the year of grace nineteen hundred and sixty-eight (the year of the faith which is transformed into hope) by praying for Peace; praying all together, in our churches and in our homes-that is what We ask of you for now. Let no voice be missing from the great chorus of the Church and of the world, beseeching Christ Who was immolated for us to "Grant us peace!".

May Our Apostolic Blessing descend upon you and remain always.

From the Vatican, 8 December 1967.

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