

# PEACE ON EARTH: WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR PEACE

SECOND SUNDAY OF ORD TIME 2012/2018 (B)

The opening prayer at Mass on this second Sunday of ordinary time is: Father of heaven and earth, hear our prayers, and show us the way to peace in the world.

## **The Vocation for Peace**

In today's gospel reading (Jn 1:35-42) the disciples meet Jesus for the first time. They asked him a very simple question: where do you live? His reply 'come and see' initiated the Christian experience. Since then the history of the world has been different. Simon became the rock of faith. The disciples with him became the foundation of the Church. The Church's purpose was to continue the mission of Christ in the world. One of the major aspects of that mission was peace, a kingdom of peace. Blessed are the peace-makers, they shall be called the children of God (Mt 5:9).

One of the saddest aspects of history since then is that Christians fought each other, and this has contributed mightily to the protestations of people against religion. They often say that religion is intolerance writ large and brings continual strife. The fact is that at its beginning, and for centuries afterwards, the Church was not involved in war; it followed Our Lord who was against all violence. He invited his followers to turn the other cheek (Mt 5:39); that made a lot of sense then when there was a prevailing atmosphere in Palestine for revolt against the Roman occupiers. In recent times the popes have not ceased to insist that war solves nothing. However, the pursuit of peace involves very complex issues. The necessity of defence, and the conditions for a just war are not superficial questions. We need only to think of what we expect from our police forces. There is a lot of Christian thinking behind all of this. We are not responsible for what went before us. We can only be somewhat responsible for where we are now, since we have become conscious participants in history. In terms of this history we, each of us, must make our own way, but we know we will go nowhere at all without a community and a society in which to work for justice and peace.

## **Our Vocation**

Each of us as a believer seeks consciously the best way to live out our vocation. Normally we call this vocation our way of life, with our profession or our job. With others we make up the fabric of society, and together we make up the Church. So we have a twofold

vocation, our own personal commitment and that of the communities in which we live. We continually try to turn our professions and jobs into our vocations as believers, and encourage others to do the same. Hence our sorrow when there are so many unemployed, and very often with that condition comes despair, self-depreciation, and the danger of violence. The evidence of this is before our eyes every day. The deprived and the poor and emarginated very often are most violent with each other. This is a well documented fact. But why are there so many poor and deprived? This is mostly a societal responsibility beyond the scope of most individual's capabilities. And the Church has a voice here too.

The vocation of the Church is to bring peace and harmony among people. It exists to remove the walls of separation. There is a way of living which, if followed, will bring peace. That is what St. Paul is talking about in today's reading; we make up one body, the body of Christ. He spells it out in the Epistle to the Galatians (3:28): There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

### **Listening**

To find one's vocation and to be faithful to it one must listen. That is the message from our first reading today (1 Sam 3:3-10.19). Speak, Lord, your servant is listening. Peace is first of all associated with silence. There is a private silence and a public silence, a private peace and a public peace. The wish for peace comes up during the Mass. At the beginning: peace be with you. We offer each other the sign of peace. We are dismissed to go in peace. We pray for the dead that they rest in peace. We hope they will sleep the sleep of the peace.

Then there is a private silence that helps us to cultivate a private peace. It is so very important to have such silence. How often we long for it as we are bombarded with noise. We have only to think of the shops, the passing cars, not to mention the ghetto blasters. External silence helps internal peace. Probably most people would like great silence especially at times of importance as when the doctor is examining us as a patient, and we notice that in the aircraft as the pilot asks the flight attendants to prepare for take off, and for landing, a hush descends.

### **Conclusion**

On peace Sunday it is helpful to think about peace and what contributes to it. It is a salutary exercise to look up the names of those who have been given the Nobel prize for

peace. People's expectations in this respect may surprise us. So far no pope has received it! It shows the difficulty and scope in finding a common understanding of what peace involves and who contributes significantly to its realisation. In many nominations it had to do with people ending war or preventing it, and in promoting humanitarian enterprises. In the Christian context the true disciple of Christ is one who not only prevents violence, but obviates the attitudes and selfishness that lead to alienation. Some people are far better at it than others. Experience in family and community easily teaches us that.

It is a marvellous gift from God to be at peace, and marvellous to help create this reality in others. Peace Sunday can make us all reflect on what we truly stand for; it is so personal we cannot leave it to others, as though it is just about politics and economics. War and Peace are in a constant struggle in our own hearts. Our Lord said, My peace I leave you, my peace I give you (Jn 16:1ff.). And with Zachary the Church prays daily: Guide our feet in the way of peace (Benedictus, Luke 1:79) . A Happy Sunday to you all. Amen.

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