

Jan.1, 2012 FEAST OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD & WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR PEACE

1) On the first day of the New Year, we celebrate the Feast of Mary, Mother of God, and we join in the Church's worldwide observance of Prayer for Peace. What better way can we begin the New Year than to look to Mary, our Mother, who brought us Jesus our Saviour and God? She will guide us and care for us so that we may find the fulfillment of our lives in Jesus.

To have peace in the world is at the centre of Mary's heart. Only with peace can true human development take place, and poverty and hunger, homelessness and lack of health care be overcome.

Every January 1, our Holy Father gives us his message for the World Day of Prayer for Peace on this day. The subject of his message this year is Educating Our Young People in Justice and Peace. The Holy Father says the beginning of a new year is another gift of God to humanity. He extends to all of us with great confidence and affection, his heartfelt good wishes that this time now before us may be marked concretely by justice and peace.

The Holy Father asks with what attitude should we look to the New Year? People of faith wait for the Lord with firm hope because they know that he will bring light, mercy and salvation. Pope Benedict invites us to look to 2012 with this attitude of confident trust. The year now ending has been marked by a rising sense of frustration at the crisis looming over society, over the world of labour and the economy.

In this shadow however, human hearts continue to wait for a new dawn. This expectation is particularly powerful in young people. The Holy Father is thinking of the contribution which they can and must make to society. He devotes his message to the theme of "Educating Young People in Justice and Peace" in the conviction that the young with their enthusiasm and idealism, can offer new hope to the world. Attentiveness to young people and their concerns, the ability to listen to them and appreciate them is a primary duty for all of us, for the sake of building a future of justice and peace. We need to communicate to young people an appreciation for the positive value of life and of awakening in them a desire to spend their lives in the service of the Good. This is a task which engages each of us personally.

Young people desire to look to the future with solid hope. They are experiencing apprehension about many things: they want an education which prepares them more fully to deal with the real world, they see how difficult it is to form a family and to find stable employment ; they wonder if they can really contribute to political, cultural and economic life and build a society with a more human and fraternal face.

2) EDUCATORS - FAMILIES

Education is the most interesting and difficult adventure in life. It calls for responsibility on the part of the learners who must be open to being led to the knowledge of reality, and on the part of educators, who must be ready to give of themselves. We need more than ever authentic witnesses and not simply people who parcel out rules and facts, witnesses who first live the lives that they propose to others.

True education in justice and peace takes place first of all in the family. In the family, children learn human and Christian values, solidarity, care and mutual support between the generations, respect for rules, forgiveness and how to welcome others.

Families and life itself are constantly threatened and often fragmented. Working conditions often incompatible with family responsibilities, worries about the future, the frenetic pace of life, the need to move frequently to ensure an adequate livelihood – all of this makes it hard to ensure that children receive one of the most precious of treasures: the presence of their parents. This presence makes it possible to pass on experiences and convictions which can only be communicated by spending time together.

May parents encourage children by the example of their lives to put their hope before all else in God, the one source of authentic justice and peace.

3) EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. May those in charge of educational institutions ensure that the dignity of each person is always respected and appreciated. Every young person must be enabled to discover his or her own vocation and helped to develop his or her God-given gifts. May they reassure families that their children can receive an education that does not conflict with their consciences and their religious principles. May young people esteem their brothers and sisters, daily exercise fraternal love and compassion towards others and take an active part in the building of a more humane and fraternal society.

4) POLITICAL LEADERS. Let political leaders ensure that no one is ever denied access to education and that families are able freely to choose the educational structures they consider most suitable for their children. Let them give young people an image of politics as a genuine service to the good of all.

5) MASS MEDIA. The mass media not only inform but also form the minds of their audiences. The connection between education and communication is extremely close: education takes through communication which influences, for better or for worse, the formation of the person.

6) EDUCATING IN TRUTH. In order to educate in truth, it is necessary first and foremost to know who the human person is. Man is a being who bears within his heart a thirst for the infinite, a thirst for truth capable of explaining life's meaning – that he was created in the image and likeness of God. The grateful recognition that life is an inestimable gift leads to the discovery of one's own profound dignity and the inviolability of every single person. Hence the first step in education is learning to recognize the Creator's image in man, and consequently learning to have a profound respect for every human being and helping others to live a life in accord with this supreme dignity.

7) EDUCATING IN FREEDOM. Only in relation to God does man understand the meaning of human freedom. Authentic freedom is not the absence of constraint. When man believes himself to be absolute, to depend on nothing and no one, to be able to do anything he wants, he ends up forfeiting his freedom. On the contrary, man lives in relationship with others and especially with God. Authentic freedom can never be obtained independently of God.

A particularly insidious obstacle to the task of educating is the massive presence in our culture of that relativism which, recognizing nothing as definitive, leaves as the ultimate criterion only the self with its desires. With such a relativistic horizon, every person is condemned to doubting the goodness of his or her own life and the relationships of which it consists

8) EDUCATING IN JUSTICE. Justice is determined not only by positive law, but by the profound identity of the human being. This vision of justice enables us to locate justice within the horizon of solidarity and love. Some currents of modern culture, built upon individualistic economic principles, have detached justice from love and solidarity. The earthly city is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness: giving without expecting a return; mercy and sharing of life. Fraternal love always manifests God's love in human relationships as well, it gives divine and saving value to all work for justice.

9) EDUCATING IN PEACE. Peace cannot be obtained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among people, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternal love. We Christians believe that Christ is our true peace; in him, by his Cross, God has reconciled the world to himself and has broken down the walls of division that separated us from one another; in him, there is but one family, reconciled in love.

Peace is a task to be undertaken. We must educate ourselves in compassion, solidarity, working together, fraternity, in being active within the community and concerned to raise awareness about national and international issues and the importance of seeking adequate mechanisms for the redistribution of wealth, the promotion of growth, and cooperation for development and conflict resolution.

10) RAISING OUR EYES TO GOD. To all, and to young people in particular, I wish to say emphatically: “It is not ideologies that save the world, but only a return to our living God, our Creator, an unconditional return to God who is the measure of what is right and who at the same time is everlasting love. And what could save us, apart from love?”

Dear young people, you are a precious gift for society. Do not yield to discouragement. Do not be afraid to make a commitment, to face hard work and sacrifice, to choose the paths that demand humility and dedication. Live fully this time in your life so rich and full of enthusiasm.

Realize that you yourselves are an example and inspiration to adults, even more so to the extent that you seek to overcome injustice and strive to build a better future.

You are never alone. The Church offers you the most precious gift she has: the opportunity to raise your eyes to God, to encounter Jesus Christ` who is himself justice and peace.

OUR MASS

We are gathered together in an assembly of peace, joined together in Christ, who reconciles and unites all of us in himself.

By his Death and Resurrection he has brought his peace, the peace of God, into the world.
Through his saving action in the Mass, he shares his power of peace with us,
to extend it to others.

Our Sign of Peace expresses that we are at peace with one another, one in Christ, all bound together in Christ. This makes us able to open our hearts to Christ when we receive him in Communion.

May Christ shape our hearts so that he may live in us
and extend his peace and forgiveness to others.