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Letter from the Prelate (January 2007)

A letter from Bishop Javier Echevarría to the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei, focusing on peace.

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During the Christmas season, the Church reminds us on several occasions that at the most important moment in history, when God-made-man came into the world, a song of joy resounded in the heavens: "Glory

to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good will" (Lk 2:14). The angels' hymn shows us that the glory of God and peace on earth are closely united realities. In calling us to share in his intimate life, God has incorporated us to the infinite communion of love that exists in the heart of the Trinity. God the Father sent his Son into the world; and later the Father and the Son sent us the Holy Spirit. Since then, and right to the end of time, he pours out through the Church, God's family on earth, his love, joy and peace.

Today, the first day of January, is the World Day of Peace. It is a very good day to beseech our Lord to infuse this celestial gift into every heart and into society. As the Holy Father reminded us at the beginning of Advent, "peace is the goal to which the whole of humanity aspires! For believers 'Peace' is one of the most beautiful names of God, who wants all his

children to agree with one another" (Homily, December 2, 2006).

Christ came to tear down the wall separating Jews and Gentiles, making of the two a new people (*Cf.* Eph 2:14-17) that would serve God in justice and holiness. He came to instill peace, "not only between Jews and non-Jews, but between all nations, since all have their origin in the same God, the one Creator and Lord of the universe" (Benedict XVI, Homily in Ephesus, November 29, 2006).

In this regard, the pontifical message for the World Day of Peace has a very significant title this year: "The Human Person, the Heart of Peace." The Pope wants to emphasize that efforts to promote peace in the world, always laudable, end up being ineffective or transitory if a true concern to respect the dignity of all men and women is lacking. "I am

convinced,” he wrote, “that respect for the person promotes peace and that, in building peace, the foundations are laid for an authentic integral humanism. In this way a serene future is prepared for coming generations” (Message for the World Day of Peace 2007).

The Pope reminds us of the many consequences that stem from this important principle: the right to life and religious freedom; the natural equality of all human beings, reflected in the safe-guarding of human rights; the need to foster harmony and understanding among people of different religions, cultures, and races. As an indispensable premise, he points out that true peace is a gift of God and a task conferred upon mankind. In so far as it is a divine gift, it was promised to mankind from ancient times; but only with the birth of Christ was it sent to earth.

"Ecce pax non promissa, sed missa," writes Saint Bernard. "Now our peace is not promised but sent; it is not deferred but granted; not prophesied but achieved. It is as if God the Father sent upon the earth a sackful of his mercy, which will burst open during our Lord's passion to pour forth its hidden contents—the price of our redemption. It was only a small sack, but it was very full. As Scripture tells us: 'a child has been given to us,' but in him 'dwells all the fullness of the divine nature'" (*Sermon 1 on the Epiphany of the Lord*). Let us thank God for his infinite mercy, also in the name of those who have not recognized it. And let us feel the need to love all human beings; let us call to mind more frequently St. Josemaría, to whom the world seemed so small.

At the same time, peace implies a task entrusted to men *of good will*; a good will that stems from the love

that God has for us. Thus, as you know, one can translate the angels' song more literally: "and peace on earth to men who love God." The task of fostering peace is not only in the hands of those who have direct responsibility for public affairs; it is also in the hands of all citizens without exception, in accord with each one's possibilities. Let us carry out each day this joyful task of striving to be "sowers of peace and joy," as St. Josemaría liked to say, in the various spheres of our life. Are we spreading peace to souls? Can they say that we love them? How much are we praying for those who are suffering?

The first field in which we have to cultivate peace is our own soul, where this divine gift should reign so that we can then transmit it to others. From man's heart comes evil; but with God's grace there also come the good things that man is capable

of. “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Lk6:45). As Benedict XVI says: “*Grace* is the power that transforms man and the world; *peace* is the mature fruit of this transformation” (Homily in Ephesus, November 29, 2006). But this requires the free collaboration of the human person in the divine plan of salvation. And since the cause of conflicts resides fundamentally in the heart, each person needs to struggle decisively within himself, to make firm the reign of God in his own soul.

This is a truth as old as the Gospel, although unfortunately many don't know it or don't put it into practice. Our Lord said: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a

sword” (Mt 10:34). He spoke of the struggle against sin, an indispensable prerequisite for true peace.

When one truly strives to uproot the weeds of sin and to identify oneself with Christ, a Christian’s life is converted into good soil, where the virtues germinate that make possible the harmonious coexistence, imbued with charity and peace, of people from the most varied environments. As Benedict XVI said, “alongside the ecology of nature, there exists what can be called a ‘human’ ecology, which in turn demands a ‘social’ ecology.” And he adds: “there is an urgent need...for a commitment to a *human ecology that can favor the growth of the ‘tree of peace’*” (Message for the World Day of Peace 2007).

Let us spread everywhere these longings of the Holy Father. And at the same time, with a big heart, let us

ask our Lord for forgiveness and make reparation for the sins with which we offend him, and also for those who offend him in many parts of the world by the promotion of behavior contrary to the natural law, and therefore to human dignity.

With the new year, we celebrate Mary's divine maternity, the root of all the graces God has granted to our Mother. Let us go to her intercession filled with trust, placing in her hands our personal struggle for sanctity and our prayer for peace. Our Lady, *Regina Pacis*, will obtain from Jesus, "the Prince of Peace" (Is 9:6), this divine gift so longed for by souls, the Church, and the whole world.