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Meditation on Peace

Some reflections on Christ's gift of peace, and how to foster it both in our own heart and in those around us.

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- Blessed are the peacemakers
- The realism of prayer
- Forging peace from the family

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: ...

blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God (Mt 5:1-2.9). In the Gospel of Saint Matthew, our Lord, before confirming his words with wonders, teaches us that the beatitudes are the road to happiness on earth and in heaven. The path set forth may at first surprise us: to be poor in spirit, to be concerned about the suffering of others, to seek justice, to have a clean heart, to not return evil for evil... And, also, to be a person who builds peace.

Saint Paul VI, in the middle of the 1960's, said: "While the tragic experience of the last World War recedes into history, we unfortunately have to record the reappearance of a spirit of rivalry between the nations."^[1] And in 1989 Saint John Paul II, observing a similar atmosphere, warned: "Vigilant remembrance of the past ought to make our contemporaries

attentive to potential abuses in exercising the freedom which the war generation sacrificed so much to attain. The fragile balance of peace could easily be compromised if evils such as racial hatred, contempt for foreigners, segregation of the sick and the elderly, exclusion of the poor, recourse to private and collective violence were revived in people's consciences.”^[2] And closer to our own time, Pope Francis, pointing to the many conflicts in different parts of the world and the ever-growing interdependence between countries, said that one could even speak of a “world war fought piecemeal.”^[3] In such a context, how can we help make those words of peace that Jesus addressed to his disciples a reality in our world today?

*How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good
tidings, who announces peace (Is*

52:7), says the prophet Isaiah – referring to Christ and, in Him, to all who wish to follow in his footsteps. Seeing the chaos and misunderstanding to which violence gives rise, we are called to be sowers of hope. “The attainment of peace depends above all on recognizing that we are, in God, one human family ... Peace is not a dream or something utopian; it is possible,”^[4] Benedict XVI encouraged us. Jesus shows us that “either we are brothers and sisters, or everything falls apart.”^[5]

“PEACE, TRUTH, UNITY, JUSTICE. How difficult it often seems to eliminate the barriers to human harmony! And yet we Christians,” Saint Josemaria stressed, “are called to bring about that miracle of fraternity.”^[6] God, from the beginning of time, has wanted to reveal to us the sadness caused by violence between his children. *Where is your*

brother? (Gen 4:9), he asks Cain in the book of Genesis. This is a question that resounds down through the centuries, reminding us of the task of caring for all our brothers and sisters on this earth. The “miracle of fraternity” needs our collaboration, our positive commitment, since we can all help in some way. In first place, God counts on our prayer. If we are attentive, we realize that at Mass we are praying constantly for peace.

It is only natural that, when we realize we are children of the same Father, we are concerned about whatever happens anywhere in the world. Living the communion of the saints makes us experience the destiny of many other persons as our own. In a world interconnected almost instantaneously, it is understandable to always want to know what is taking place, to be tuned in to the means of

communication that bring us close to these far-off places. Nevertheless, it may happen that “the speed with which information is communicated exceeds our capacity for reflection and judgement, and this does not make for more balanced and proper forms of self-expression. The world of communications can help us either to expand our knowledge or to lose our bearings.”^[7] In this context, along with the personal responsibility to be accurately informed about the world that we love, we should also be attentive to a possible disorder in wanting to know everything, in real time, or to know the greatest possible number of details. The Prelate of Opus Dei, making reference to the communications profession, pointed out that “a serene communicator can infuse a Christian perspective in the inevitably rapid flow of public opinion.”^[8] Analogously, a serene consumer of the news can assimilate

information from a Christian perspective and help others to do so.

“Understanding begins when we strive to see specific people (and not an anonymous 'crowd') at the heart of each act of communication, even though these people are not physically present. We don't see them, but they are there, with all their dignity, especially when they are more vulnerable.”^[9] We can achieve this balance in staying informed about conflicts if we have the realism that comes from a life of prayer and charity with those closest to us; a realism forged in silence and in daily life, which spurs us to serve others, here and now, in the midst of our family and profession.

Contemplative life leads us to be concerned about what we can truly help to change effectively: first in ourselves and then in the milieu in which we are immersed, striving to imbue it with peace.

REPAY NO ONE EVIL FOR EVIL, Saint Paul tells the Romans, *but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all* (Rom 12:17-18). Our ardent desire to see peace reach so many places in the world can be a good spur for us to strive to achieve the same in our own setting. Perhaps we too have our own small domestic conflicts, our enmities with people with whom we interact daily. The wisdom of the Jewish people contains the following maxim: *It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife; but every fool will be quarreling* (Prov 20:3). And this happens both at the political level as well as the domestic one. Saint John Paul II, who has been called “the Pope of the family,” saw that it is precisely in the family that future peace for the world is sown; “Little children very soon learn about life. They watch and imitate the behavior of adults. They rapidly

learn love and respect for others, but they also quickly absorb the poison of violence and hatred. Family experiences strongly condition the attitudes which children will assume as adults. Consequently, if the family is the place where children first encounter the world, the family must be for children the first school of peace.”^[10] —

And Pope Francis stressed: “If violence has its source in the human heart, then it is fundamental that nonviolence be practiced before all else within families ... The family is the indispensable crucible in which spouses, parents and children, brothers and sisters, learn to communicate and to show generous concern for one another, and in which frictions and even conflicts have to be resolved not by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the good of the other, mercy and forgiveness. From the heart of the

family, joy spreads out into the world and radiates to the whole of society.”^[11] —

The founder of Opus Dei, in his search for peace, had frequent recourse to our Lady. In Mary we can find, first of all, interior peace for ourselves, and then peace for those around us. “Holy Mary is the Queen of peace, and thus the Church invokes her. So when your soul or your family are troubled, or things go wrong at work, in society or between nations, cry out to her without ceasing with this title: *Regina pacis, ora pro nobis* – Queen of peace, pray for us. Have you at least tried it when you have lost your calm? You will be surprised at its immediate effect.”^[12] —

^[1] — Saint Paul VI, Message, 1 January 1974.

^[2] — Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, 27 August 1989.

[3] Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, no. 259.

[4] Benedict XVI, Message, 1 January 2013.

[5] Francis, Video message, 4 February 2022.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 157.

[7] Francis, Message, 1 June 2014.

[8] Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Address, 19 April 2018.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Saint John Paul II, Message, 1 January 1996.

[11] Francis, Message, 1 January 2017.

[12] Saint Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 874.

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