



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD AND
39th WORLD DAY OF PEACE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica
Sunday, 1 January 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's liturgy our gaze continues to be turned to the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, while with particular emphasis we contemplate the Motherhood of the Virgin Mary.

In the Pauline passage we have heard (cf. Gal 4: 4), the Apostle very discreetly points to the One through whom the Son of God enters the world: Mary of Nazareth, Mother of God, *Theotokos*.

At the beginning of a new year, we are invited, as it were, to attend her school, the school of the faithful disciple of the Lord, in order to learn from her to accept in faith and prayer the salvation God desires to pour out upon those who trust in his merciful love.

Salvation is a gift of God; in the first reading, it was presented as a blessing: "The Lord bless you and keep you!... The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!" (Nm 6: 24, 26).

This is the blessing that priests used to invoke upon the people at the end of the great liturgical feasts, particularly the feast of the New Year. We are in the presence of a text packed with meaning, punctuated by the Name of the Lord which is repeated at the beginning of every verse. This text is not limited to the mere enunciation of principles but strives to realize what it says.

Indeed, as is widely known, in Semitic thought the blessing of the Lord produces well-being and salvation through its own power, just as cursing procures disgrace and ruin. The effectiveness of blessing is later more specifically brought about by God, who protects us (v. 24), favours us (v. 25)

and gives us peace, which is to say in other words, he offers us an abundance of happiness.

By having us listen once again to this ancient blessing at the beginning of a new solar year, the liturgy, as it were, encourages us in turn to invoke the Lord's blessing upon the New Year that is just beginning, so that it may be a year of prosperity and peace for us all. It is precisely this wish that I would like to address to the distinguished Ambassadors of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See who are taking part in today's liturgical celebration.

I greet Cardinal Angelo Sodano, my Secretary of State. With him, I greet Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino and all the members of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. I am particularly grateful to them for their commitment to disseminating the annual Message for the World Day of Peace, addressed to Christians and to all men and women of good will.

I also offer a cordial greeting to the many *choirboys* who with their singing add to the solemnity of this Holy Mass, during which we ask God for the gift of peace for the whole world.

By choosing the theme "*In truth, peace*" as the [Message for the World Day of Peace](#), I wanted to express the conviction that "*whenever men and women are enlightened by the splendour of truth, they naturally set out on the path of peace*" (n. 3). How can we not see in this an effective and appropriate realization of the Gospel just proclaimed, in which we contemplated the scene of the shepherds on their way to Bethlehem to adore the Child? (cf. Lk 2: 16).

Are not those shepherds, whom the Evangelist Luke describes to us in their poverty and simplicity, obedient to the Angel's order and docile to God's will, perhaps the image most easily accessible to each one of us of the person who allows himself to be enlightened by the truth and is thereby enabled to build a world of peace?

Peace! This great, heartfelt aspiration of every man and every woman is built day after day by the contribution of all and by treasuring the wonderful heritage passed down to us by the Second Vatican Council with the Pastoral Constitution [Gaudium et Spes](#), which says, among other things, that humanity will not succeed in "the establishment of a truly human world for all men over the entire earth, unless everyone devotes himself to the cause of true peace with renewed vigour" (n. 77).

The time in history when the Constitution [Gaudium et Spes](#) was promulgated, 7 December 1965, was not very different from our time. Then, as unfortunately also in our day and age, tensions of various kinds were looming on the world horizon. In the face of the lasting situations of injustice and violence that continue to oppress various parts of the earth, in the face of those that are emerging as new and more insidious threats to peace - terrorism, nihilism and fanatical fundamentalism - it is becoming more necessary than ever to work together for peace!

A "start" of courage and trust in God and man is necessary if we are to choose the path of peace. And it must be on the part of all: individuals and peoples, international organizations and world powers.

In the [Message](#) for today's event, I wanted in particular to call the United Nations Organization to a renewed awareness of its responsibilities in encouraging the values of justice, solidarity and peace in a world that is ever more marked by the vast phenomenon of globalization.

If peace is the aspiration of every person of good will, for Christ's disciples it is a permanent mandate that involves all; it is a demanding mission that impels them to announce and witness to "the Gospel of Peace", proclaiming that recognition of God's full truth is an indispensable pre-condition for the consolidation of the truth of peace.

May this awareness continue to grow so that every Christian community becomes the "leaven" of a humanity renewed by love.

"And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (Lk 2: 19).

The first day of the year is placed under the sign of a woman, Mary. The Evangelist Luke describes her as the silent Virgin who listens constantly to the eternal Word, who lives in the Word of God. Mary treasures in her heart the words that come from God and, piecing them together as in a mosaic, learns to understand them.

Let us too, at her school, learn to become attentive and docile disciples of the Lord. With her motherly help, let us commit ourselves to working enthusiastically in the "workshop" of peace, following Christ, the Prince of Peace.

After the example of the Blessed Virgin, may we let ourselves be guided always and only by Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever! (Heb 13: 8). Amen.