



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

46th WORLD DAY OF PEACE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica

Tuesday, 1st January 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“May God bless us and make his face to shine upon us.” We proclaimed these words from Psalm 66 after hearing in the first reading the ancient priestly blessing upon the people of the covenant. It is especially significant that at the start of every new year God sheds upon us, his people, the light of his Holy Name, the Name pronounced three times in the solemn form of biblical blessing. Nor is it less significant that to the Word of God – who “became flesh and dwelt among us” (*Jn* 1:14) as “the true light that enlightens every man” (1:9) – is given, as today’s Gospel tells us, the Name of Jesus eight days after his birth (cf. *Lk* 2:21).

It is in this Name that we are gathered here today. I cordially greet all present, beginning with the Ambassadors of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See. I greet with affection Cardinal Bertone, my Secretary of State, and Cardinal Turkson, with all the officials of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; I am particularly grateful to them for their effort to spread the Message for the World Day of Peace, which this year has as its theme “Blessed are the Peacemakers”.

Although the world is sadly marked by “hotbeds of tension and conflict caused by growing instances of inequality between rich and poor, by the prevalence of a selfish and individualistic mindset which also finds expression in an unregulated financial capitalism,” as well as by various forms of terrorism and crime, I am convinced that “the many different efforts at peacemaking which

abound in our world testify to mankind's innate vocation to peace. In every person the desire for peace is an essential aspiration which coincides in a certain way with the desire for a full, happy and successful human life. In other words, the desire for peace corresponds to a fundamental moral principle, namely, the duty and right to an integral social and communitarian development, which is part of God's plan for mankind. Man is made for the peace which is God's gift. All of this led me to draw inspiration for this Message from the words of Jesus Christ: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' (*Mt 5:9*)" (*Message*, 1). This beatitude "tells us that peace is both a messianic gift and the fruit of human effort ... It is peace with God through a life lived according to his will. It is interior peace with oneself, and exterior peace with our neighbours and all creation" (*ibid.*, 2, 3). Indeed, peace is the supreme good to ask as a gift from God and, at the same time, that which is to be built with our every effort.

We may ask ourselves: what is the basis, the origin, the root of peace? How can we experience that peace within ourselves, in spite of problems, darkness and anxieties? The reply is given to us by the readings of today's liturgy. The biblical texts, especially the one just read from the Gospel of Luke, ask us to contemplate the interior peace of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. During the days in which "she gave birth to her first-born son" (*Lk 2:7*), many unexpected things occurred: not only the birth of the Son but, even before, the tiring journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, not finding room at the inn, the search for a chance place to stay for the night; then the song of the angels and the unexpected visit of the shepherds. In all this, however, Mary remains even tempered, she does not get agitated, she is not overcome by events greater than herself; in silence she considers what happens, keeping it in her mind and heart, and pondering it calmly and serenely. This is the interior peace which we ought to have amid the sometimes tumultuous and confusing events of history, events whose meaning we often do not grasp and which disconcert us.

The Gospel passage finishes with a mention of the circumcision of Jesus. According to the Law of Moses, eight days after birth, baby boys were to be circumcised and then given their name.

Through his messenger, God himself had said to Mary – as well as to Joseph – that the Name to be given to the child was "Jesus" (cf. *Mt 1:21*; *Lk 1:31*); and so it came to be. The Name which God had already chosen, even before the child had been conceived, is now officially conferred upon him at the moment of circumcision. This also changes Mary's identity once and for all: she becomes "the mother of Jesus", that is the mother of the Saviour, of Christ, of the Lord. Jesus is not a man like any other, but the Word of God, one of the Divine Persons, the Son of God: therefore the Church has given Mary the title *Theotokos* or Mother of God.

The first reading reminds us that peace is a gift from God and is linked to the splendour of the face of God, according to the text from the Book of Numbers, which hands down the blessing used by the priests of the People of Israel in their liturgical assemblies. This blessing repeats three times the Holy Name of God, a Name not to be spoken, and each time it is linked to two words indicating an action in favour of man: "The Lord bless you and keep you: the Lord make his face to shine upon you: the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (6:24-26). So peace is

the summit of these six actions of God in our favour, in which he turns towards us the splendour of his face.

For sacred Scripture, contemplating the face of God is the greatest happiness: "You gladden him with the joy of your face" (*Ps* 21:7). From the contemplation of the face of God are born joy, security and peace. But what does it mean concretely to contemplate the face of the Lord, as understood in the New Testament? It means knowing him directly, in so far as is possible in this life, through Jesus Christ in whom he is revealed. To rejoice in the splendour of God's face means penetrating the mystery of his Name made known to us in Jesus, understanding something of his interior life and of his will, so that we can live according to his plan of love for humanity. In the second reading, taken from the Letter to the Galatians (4:4-7), Saint Paul says as much as he describes the Spirit who, in our inmost hearts, cries: "Abba! Father!" It is the cry that rises from the contemplation of the true face of God, from the revelation of the mystery of his Name. Jesus declares, "I have manifested thy name to men" (*Jn* 17:6). God's Son made man has let us know the Father, he has let us know the hidden face of the Father through his visible human face; by the gift of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts, he has led us to understand that, in him, we too are children of God, as Saint Paul says in the passage we have just heard: "The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, 'Abba, Father'" (*Gal* 4:6).

Here, dear brothers and sisters, is the foundation of our peace: the certainty of contemplating in Jesus Christ the splendour of the face of God the Father, of being sons in the Son, and thus of having, on life's journey, the same security that a child feels in the arms of a loving and all-powerful Father. The splendour of the face of God, shining upon us and granting us peace, is the manifestation of his fatherhood: the Lord turns his face to us, he reveals himself as our Father and grants us peace. Here is the principle of that profound peace – "peace with God" – which is firmly linked to faith and grace, as Saint Paul tells the Christians of Rome (cf. *Rom* 5:2). Nothing can take this peace from believers, not even the difficulties and sufferings of life. Indeed, sufferings, trials and darkness do not undermine but build up our hope, a hope which does not deceive because "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (5:5).

May the Virgin Mary, whom today we venerate with the title of Mother of God, help us to contemplate the face of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. May she sustain us and accompany us in this New Year: and may she obtain for us and for the whole world the gift of peace. Amen!

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