



The Holy See

HOLY MASS ON THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD
AND THE 12TH WORLD DAY OF PEACE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Monday, 1 January 1979

1. Year 1979. The first day of the month of January; the first day of the New Year.

Entering the doors of this Basilica today, I would like, together with you all, beloved Brothers and Sisters, to greet this year, I would like to say to it: welcome!

I do so on the day of the octave of Christmas. Today is already the eighth day of this great feast which, according to the rhythm of the liturgy, concludes and begins every year.

The year is the human measure of time. Time speaks to us of the "passing" to which the whole of creation is subjected. Man is aware of this passing. Not only does he go through time, but he also "measures the time" of his passing: time made of days, weeks, months and years. In this human flow there is always the sadness of farewell to the past and, at the same time, opening to the future.

Precisely this farewell to the past and this opening to the future are inscribed, by means of the language and rhythm of the liturgy of the Church, in the solemnity of the Lord's Nativity.

Birth always speaks of a beginning, the beginning of what is born. The Lord's Nativity speaks of an extraordinary beginning. In the first place it speaks of that beginning which precedes any time, of the origin that is God himself, without a beginning. During this octave we have been nourished every day on the mystery of perennial generation in God, the mystery of the Son generated eternally by the Father: "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made" (*Profession of Faith*).

In these days we have also been, in a particular way, witnesses of the earthly birth of this Son. Being born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary as Man, "Word-God, he accepts time. He enters history. He submits to the law of human flow. He closes the past: with him there ends the time of expectation, that is, the Old Covenant. He opens the future: the New Covenant of grace and reconciliation with God. He is the new "Beginning" of the New Time. Every new year participates in this Beginning. It is the Year of the Lord. Welcome, Year 1979! From the very beginning you are the measure of the new time, inscribed in the mystery of the birth of God!

2. On this first day of the New Year the whole Church prays for peace. It was the great Pontiff Paul VI who made for the whole Church the problem of peace the subject of prayer on New Year's Day. Today, following his noble initiative, we take this subject up again with full conviction, fervour and humility. In fact, on this day which opens the New Year, it is not possible to formulate a more fundamental wish than this wish for peace. "Deliver us from evil"! Reciting these words of Christ's prayer, it is very difficult to give them a different content from the one that opposes peace, that destroys it, that threatens it. Let us pray therefore: Deliver us from war, from hatred, from the destruction of human lives! Do not allow us to kill! Do not allow use of those means which, are in the service of death and destruction and whose power, range of action, and precision go beyond the limits known hitherto. Do not allow them to be used ever! "Deliver us from evil!" Defend us from war! From any war. Father, who are in Heaven, Father of life and Giver of peace, the Pope, the son of a nation which, during history, and particularly in our century, has been among those most sorely tried in the horror, the cruelty, and the cataclysm of war, supplicates you. He supplicates you for all peoples in the world, for all countries and for all continents. He supplicates you in the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

How significant are Jesus Christ's words, which we recall every day in the eucharistic liturgy: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." (Jn 14:27).

It is this dimension of Peace, the deepest dimension, that only Christ can give to man. It is the fullness of Peace, rooted in reconciliation with God himself. Inner Peace, in which brothers share by means of spiritual communion. It is this peace, above all, that we implore. But, aware that "the world" by itself—the world after original sin, the world in sin—cannot give us this peace, we implore it at the same time for the world. For man in the world. For all men, all nations, of different languages, cultures and races. For all continents. Peace is the first condition of real progress. Peace is indispensable in order that men and peoples may live in freedom. Peace is, at the same time, conditioned—as John XXIII and Paul VI teach—by the guarantee that all men and peoples be ensured the right to freedom, truth, justice, and love.

"A political society"—John XXIII teaches—" is to be considered well-ordered, beneficial and in keeping with human dignity if it is grounded on truth... This demands that reciprocal rights and duties be sincerely recognized. Furthermore, human society will be such as we have just

described it, if the citizens, guided by justice, apply themselves seriously to respecting the rights of others and discharging their own duties; if they are moved by such fervour of charity as to make their own the needs of others and share with others their own goods: if, finally, they work for a progressively closer fellowship in the world of spiritual values. Human society is realized in freedom, that is to say, in ways and means in keeping with the dignity of its citizens, who accept the responsibility of their actions, precisely because they are by nature rational beings." (John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 18; cf. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 44).

Peace, therefore, must always be learned. It is necessary, consequently, to educate oneself to peace, as the message for the first day of the year 1979 says. It is necessary to learn it honestly and sincerely at various levels and in the various environments, beginning with children in the primary schools, up to those who rule. At what stage are we in this universal education to peace? How much still remains to be done? How much must still be learned?

3. Today the church particularly venerates the Motherhood of Mary. This is, as it were, a last message of the octave of Christmas. Birth always speaks of the Begetter, of her who gives life, of her who gives man to the world. The first day of the New Year is Mother's day.

We see her then—as in so many pictures and sculptures—with the Child in her arms, with the Child at her breast. The Mother, she who begot and fed the Son of God. The Mother of Christ. There is no image that is better known and that speaks in a more simple way of the mystery of the Lord's birth than that of the Mother with Jesus in her arms. Is not this image, perhaps, the source of our extraordinary confidence? Is it not just this image that allows us to live in the circle of all the mysteries of our faith, and, while contemplating them as "divine", to consider them at the same time so "human"?

But there is yet another image of the Mother with her Son in her arms. It is in this basilica: it is "la Pietà": Mary with Jesus taken from the Cross; with Jesus who died before her eyes, on Mount Golgotha, and who after death returns to those arms on which he was offered as Saviour of the world at Bethlehem.

I would like, then, to unite our prayer for peace with this double image. I would like to connect it with this Motherhood, which the Church venerates particularly in the octave of Christmas.

Therefore I say:

"Mother,

you who know what it means
to clasp in your arms the dead body of your Son,
of him to whom you gave birth,
spare all mothers on this earth
the death of their sons,

the torments, the slavery, the destruction of war,
the persecutions, the concentration camps,
the prisons!

Keep for them the joy of birth,
of sustenance, of the development of man
and of his life.

In the name of this life,
in the name of the birth of the Lord,
implore with us peace,
and justice in the world!

Mother of Peace,
in all the beauty and majesty of your motherhood,
which the Church exalts and the world admires,
we pray to you:

Be with us at every moment!

Let this New Year be a year of peace,
in virtue of the birth and the death of your Son! ""

Amen.

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