



Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace

Pastoral Letter on Peace

Most Rev. Robert J. Carlson
Bishop of Saginaw

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“**O**n the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”

(John 20:19)

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Introduction

Why this Pastoral Letter on Peace?

In 2002, the Lord spoke to my heart: “So many desire peace, but few are willing to pray for peace.” In giving me this word, the Lord gave me a vision and a goal: to help the world come to peace through the power of prayer.

I believe that the only way we are going to get peace is if we turn to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, and ask him for it. That is why, along with Fr. Luis Mesa, I founded the Messengers of Peace — a religious order in Colombia dedicated to 1) praying for peace, in Colombia and in the World, before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and 2) working to serve the poor.

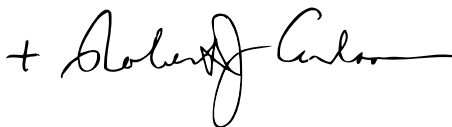
If we desire peace we must be willing to work for it. And if we are willing to work for peace that means we must be willing, first and foremost, to pray for peace. In the words of Pope John Paul II, “To pray is to enter into the action of God upon history: he, the sovereign actor of history, has wished to make people his collaborators.”¹

The Pax Christi (Peace of Christ) movement was established in Europe when the world was at war, to gather people together to pray for peace. Today Pax Christi has the same goal. But many of its members, in my limited experience, are more action oriented. There needs to be both prayer and service because, as Pope Benedict XVI noted, “The effectiveness of pastoral action depends, ultimately, upon prayer; otherwise service becomes empty activism.”²

Accordingly, the Messengers of Peace begin and end the day in

prayer for peace. During the day a handful of brothers (and soon sisters) serve the poor — children, adults and the elderly.

I invite you to join the Messengers of Peace as a “living Gospel” — a person of the Beatitudes. As we hear in the words of Pope Paul VI: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.’ (Mt. 5:9) We believe that, without the direction and assistance of Christ, true, permanent and worldwide peace is impossible.” (Pope Paul VI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1978.)

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name "Robert J. Carlson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

*+ Most Rev. Robert J. Carlson, Bishop of Saginaw
December 12, 2008, Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe*

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“**I**n the Jewish Talmud, there is an apologue that illustrates quite well the connection that exists between sin and the damage that every sin, even personal sin, does to others: “Some people found themselves on a boat. One of the passengers took a drill and began to make a hole beneath his seat. The others seeing this said to him: ‘What are you doing?’ He answered: ‘What is it to you? Am I not making a hole under my seat?’ But they replied: ‘Yes, but water will come in and we will all drown!’” Is this not what is happening in our society?”³

(Fr. Raniero Coantalamesa)

I. So Many Desire Peace, But Are Unwilling To Pray For It

“Peace is an irrepressible yearning present in the heart of each person...Consequently, everyone should feel committed to the service of this great good.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2006)

A lack of peace fills our world.

9/11 ... Al-Qaeda ... The threat of terrorism surrounds us on the outside, and the fear of terrorism haunts us on the inside.

Columbine ... Virginia Tech ... Terrible acts of violence are unleashed within our schools and workplaces, and anxiety fills our hearts every time we venture forth into the world.

Every time we read or hear of violence, the longing for peace stirs in our souls.

At the start of the Third Millennium, this is our situation. Violence between individuals and between groups dominates our headlines, while restlessness and anxiety fills our hearts. The landscape of the soul mirrors the landscape of the world: a lack of peace reigning outside of us, and a lack of peace reigning inside of us.

It seems that terrible forces have been unleashed in the world with a new fury. As a result the words of Pope Paul VI, written three decades ago, aptly describe our own time:

[there are situations that] breed an ever growing amount of injured prestige, of unrelenting desire for revenge and of endemic and organized disorder. They are not something than can be ignored, as though they will solve themselves with

time, because their poison seeps into souls, corroding humanitarian ideologies, becoming contagious and transmitting itself to the youngest generation and carrying with it a fatal inherited commitment to revenge. Violence becomes fashionable again, and even clothes itself in the breastplate of justice. It becomes a way of life...and finally presents itself as an apocalyptic specter armed with the unheard of instruments of murderous destruction.⁴

Against this background we wish for peace. But we are unsure if we dare to hope for it.

So many desire peace, but are unwilling to pray for it.

In God's plan, however, the world was made for peace. Pope John XXIII noted that "the world's Creator has stamped man's inmost being with an order revealed to man by his conscience; and his conscience insists on preserving it."⁵ And the Second Vatican Council noted that peace is "the fruit of an order which has been implanted in human society by its divine Founder" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 78).

The hope for peace was written into human nature by God. The movement toward peace belongs to the God-given direction of history. We were made to dwell in the heavenly Jerusalem, the "city of peace." Therefore we cannot give up on peace without breaking faith with God.

But while the seed of peace has been given to us as a gift, the cultivation and full flowering of the seed is given to us as a task. How will we respond?

In a recent editorial in America the author wrote that "Security in the 21st century will demand a comprehensive response that uses

a full spectrum of resources. ‘Soft power,’ in the form of diplomacy, economic development and human rights enforcement, will be more in evidence than military force.” (*America, May 12, 2008*)

This “soft power” includes a duty to protect the vulnerable regions of the world, which was one of the themes when Pope Benedict XVI addressed the United Nations in April, 2008.

I believe that the greatest form of power we can exert for the sake of peaceful security is to open ourselves to God in prayer. Doing so will help us be more attentive to the order God has written into the world, and more readily acknowledge the order God has written into human nature. This, in turn, will strengthen our ability to cooperate with God’s blueprint for peace.

It goes hand-in-hand with what the Holy Father said in his Message for the World Day of Peace in 2006:

“I ask for an increase of prayers, since peace is above all a gift of God, a gift to be implored incessantly.”

Let us be collaborators with God. Let us be instruments of God’s peaceful action upon history. Let us ask Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, to bestow the gift of peace upon us, our families, and our world.

“**C**hrist, bread from heaven, you form one body out of all who partake of the one bread, refresh all who believe in you with harmony and peace.”

(Liturgy of the Hours, Feast of Corpus Christi)

“**H**as it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become ‘unity conscious’ and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”

(A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God)

II. Jesus Christ: Our Peace

“Peace on earth — which man throughout the ages has so longed for and sought after — can never be established, never guaranteed, except by the diligent observance of the divinely established order.” (Pope John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, 1)

A. Eucharistic Adoration: Key to Peace

Mother Teresa spent an hour every day praying before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. All Missionaries of Charity do the same. Explaining why this habit is part of the rule of their life — especially when there are so many other demands on their time and energy — Mother Teresa said:

“because we find that through our daily holy hour our love for Jesus becomes more intimate, our love for each other more understanding, and our love for the poor more compassionate.”⁶

Mother Teresa would pray, every day, in front of what appears to be only a small piece of bread. But with the eyes of faith she saw the Body of Christ hidden under those appearances and, because of that, she adored.

Then, when she left her time of prayer, she devoted herself to serving people who appeared to be only shabby beggars and outcasts. But the same eyes of faith, which could discern the Body of Christ under the appearance of ordinary bread, saw the face of Christ hidden in the poorest of the poor, and because of that she served.

Mother Teresa’s experience of the connection between Eucharistic adoration and service helps to explain why Eucharistic adoration is central to the charism of the Messengers of Peace: it has the

ability to draw all of our relationships into the order intended by God. As John XXIII observed, peace cannot be established except by the diligent observance of that order.

Bringing peace to the world is a long and complex process. But the first step toward peace begins with each of us. And it begins anew each day, as we commit and constantly re-commit our hearts to Christ. As Pope Paul VI said:

Yes, Peace begins within hearts. We must first know, recognize, will and love Peace; then we shall express it, and impress it on the renewed morals of humanity; on its philosophy, its sociology, its politics.⁷

If, day by day, week by week, month by month we give our hearts to Jesus Christ and his peace, then all that we say and do will become an invitation to others to share in His peace. As our love for Jesus becomes more intimate, our love for each other will become more understanding, and our love for the poor more compassionate. Our own lives will become building blocks for peace.

By the same token: if our own hearts lack peace, then all of our actions will invite others to share the restlessness and anxiety that dwells within us. We may still do good deeds. But our deeds will not touch the deep needs and disorders of human hearts — which are the ultimate sources of violence.⁸

I believe that every person can help bring peace to the world. If you regularly place yourself in the presence of Christ, especially in the Blessed Sacrament, peace will first come to your own heart. If peace takes possession of your heart, it can spread through you to your family. If peace takes root in your family, it can flower and grow in your community and, ultimately, spread to the nation and the world.⁹

“**P**rayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbors, however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbor but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Deus Caritas Est, # 36)

B. The Logos: Blueprint for Peace

“Peace is an aspect of God’s activity, made manifest both in the creation of an orderly and harmonious universe and also in the redemption of humanity that needs to be rescued from the disorder of sin.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2007)

Mother Teresa’s experience shows that Eucharistic adoration deepens our ability to draw all of our relationships into the order intended by God. The Second Vatican Council explains that peace is the fruit of that order. The Messengers of Peace take those two principles as the foundation of their life. I invite all of us to do the same.

But it might help if we pause for a moment to reflect on why Eucharistic adoration can deepen our ability to draw all of our relationships into the order intended by God. The Gospel of John provides the key in its opening line: “In the beginning was the Word ...”

The Greek term that we translate as “Word” is actually “Logos.” In this context, the term “Logos” refers primarily to the Second Person of the Trinity, who existed before all time and took on flesh in human history. But the term “Logos” was also used in Greek philosophy to refer to God’s plan for the universe. The Logos, according to Greek philosophy, was the physical and moral “blueprint” for the world.

This is precisely the point being made by the Evangelist here: in Jesus Christ we see the Logos — God’s plan for rightly ordered relationships — in the flesh. It is precisely through communion with Jesus that we are drawn into the fullness of that plan, and peace receives its ultimate foundation.¹⁰

That is why following Jesus Christ is the blueprint for peace. And that is why, I believe, prayer before Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is crucial to cultivating the seed of peace that God has planted in the world, and in our hearts. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

The act of adoration outside Mass prolongs and intensifies all that takes place during the liturgical celebration itself. Indeed, only in adoration can a profound and genuine reception mature. And it is precisely this personal encounter with the Lord that then strengthens the social mission contained in the Eucharist, which seeks to break down not only the walls that separate the Lord and ourselves, but also and especially the walls that separate us from one another.

(Sacramentum Caritatis, 66)¹¹

To the extent that we are faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, we are following the Logos — the moral blueprint of the universe. As John XXIII noted, peace cannot be guaranteed except by diligent observance of this divinely established order.

This is the truth expressed by Mother Teresa’s rule, and it stands at the heart of the charism of the Messengers of Peace: peace is the fruit of our fidelity to Jesus Christ, and time spent in intimate communion with Christ is the engine of that fidelity.

Conversely, as Pope Benedict XVI asked, echoing the words of John XXIII: “Whenever there is a loss of fidelity to the transcendent order...how can we hope that the good of peace will be realized?”¹² To the extent that we are not faithful to Jesus, we do not follow the Logos, and so we depart from God’s blueprint for a rightly ordered world. When we depart from God’s blueprint for a rightly ordered world, the fruit of our thoughts and actions is not

peace but its lack — the very lack of peace inside and outside of us that I spoke of earlier.

Jesus Christ is the blueprint for peace. When we draw near to him, we find the strength to follow him.¹³ And in following him, we have the capacity to be messengers of peace to the world.

“**T**he transcendent “grammar,” that is to say the body of rules for individual action and the reciprocal relationships of persons in accordance with justice and solidarity, is inscribed on human consciences, in which the wise plan of God is reflected...Peace is thus also a task demanding of everyone a personal response consistent with God’s plan. The criterion inspiring this response can only be respect for the “grammar” written on human hearts by the divine Creator.

(Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2007)

C. Two Kinds of Power

“Of power there are two kinds: one is obtained through threats of punishment, the other arises from acts of love.”
(Gandhi)

In proposing that Jesus Christ is the blueprint for peace, that our efforts for peace must begin with prayer, and that prayer before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament can make a vital contribution to bringing His peace to the world, I am consciously choosing to make my efforts for peace rest on the foundation of a particular kind of power. Because the nature of this choice is so important, I want to take a moment to explain it.

Our own experience tells us that there are two kinds of power in the world. In school, we all had teachers whom we feared and teachers whose respect we sought. Those teachers whom we feared lost their power over us when we graduated. They could no longer give us detention, and that was the extent of their power over us. Those whose respect we sought, however, retained their power even after we graduated—because we continued, and sometimes continue for the rest of our lives, to wonder what they would think, say, or do in a given situation.

Both kinds of power are real. But one is greater than the other, even if it takes time for that to become clear.

History also shows us that there are two kinds of power in the world. Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin both exercised tremendous power during their lives. Their power was maintained by the use of coercive force. Many other leaders throughout history have tried to follow this path.

By contrast, Gandhi and Mother Teresa also exercised power dur-

ing their lives. But their power was of a different kind. It worked by the long roads of persuasion and service. It worked by attraction, not by coercion. Many other leaders in history have tried to follow this path.

The kind of power exercised by Hitler and Stalin is real. But history shows that it cannot long outlive those who wield it.¹⁴ The kind of power exercised by Gandhi and Mother Teresa is also real. The difference is that it is just as potent today as it was during their lives.

As before, both kinds of power are real. As before, one is greater than the other — even if it takes time for history to make that clear.

The mythological stories that children are reading today, and the movies that they are watching, often make this same point: there is a power that works by coercion and the use of force, and a power that works by attraction, and the invitation to goodness and service. The first kind of power is real, but dies with those who wield it. The second kind of power is real, and outlives the death of those who wield it.

If God is all-powerful, we ought to expect God to exercise the greatest kind of power in the world...and God's followers should strive to do the same. We can make use of stories, history, and our own experience as we reflect on what it means for God to be all-powerful, and for each of us to become powerful in the Lord.

Still, the ultimate reason that I am proposing the power of prayer as the foundation of our efforts on behalf of peace is not these philosophical speculations — which are only preliminary, and leave much to be said. The ultimate reason is this: If you want to know what God thinks of power, look to the Cross! Jesus Christ

crucified is the revelation of God's power. As Saint Paul said, "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,

*"Who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross.*

*"Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father."*

(Phil 2: 5-11)

This is one of the great paradoxes of our faith: the apparent emptying of power by Jesus is actually the revelation of the greatest kind of power. This explains why the history of power and our experience of power take the pattern they do. It is why the stories that children are learning about the different kinds of power ring so true. The truth about power is fully revealed on the Cross. Because Jesus Christ is the Logos — the moral blueprint of the universe — the same truth is reflected everywhere in the world. Because Jesus is the Logos, through whom all things were made,

it cannot be otherwise.

So, against the external forces of violence and internal forces of anxiety that have been unleashed in the world, what counter-forces for peace can we call upon?

We can call upon the kind of power that uses physical force, that “fights fire with fire,” as it were. It is a real kind of power and, in certain circumstances, the resort to this kind of power can be justified.¹⁵

But, while physical force can be used to hold the forces of violence at bay in an external or physical sense, it does nothing to diffuse their interior motivation. In fact, paradoxically, as any parent or teacher can tell you, the use of external force may even strengthen that interior motivation.

But there is another kind of power that can be called upon. Perhaps we may call it moral force. This is the kind of non-violent force that Gandhi used to drive the British from India. It is the kind of non-violent force that the civil rights movement used it to change the political, legal, and cultural landscape in the United States of America.

This kind of force is paradoxical, too. Its strength is in what, by all worldly standards, appears to be weakness. It does nothing to hold the forces of violence at bay in an external/physical sense. Rather, by letting the full fury of those forces crash in upon oneself, it does everything to show that there is a greater and more lasting power that ultimately rules the universe. (See Mt. 5: 38-45)

This was the power exercised by Jesus Christ on the Cross. It is the power used by the martyrs to proclaim the Gospel throughout history. If we are to be disciples of Jesus Christ and messengers

of peace for our day, it is this kind of power that we must learn to use.

I believe this is what Paul VI meant when he said:

It is necessary before all else to provide Peace with other weapons — weapons different from those destined to kill and exterminate mankind. What is needed, above all, are moral weapons.¹⁶

“**F**inally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty power... put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded with truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

(Ephesians 6:10, 13-17)

III. Peace, Dignity and Rights

“A true and stable peace presupposes respect for human rights...[But] Only if they are grounded in the objective requirements of the nature bestowed on man by the Creator can the rights attributed to him be affirmed without fear of contradiction.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2007.)

One essential part of the moral logic of the universe is the inalienable dignity that belongs to each person, and the fundamental rights that accompany and protect that dignity. The United Nation’s Universal Declaration on Human Rights, whose 60th anniversary is December of 2008, is grounded in the recognition of this inalienable dignity. As Pope Benedict XVI said:

That Declaration is regarded as a sort of moral commitment assumed by all mankind. There is a profound truth to this, especially if the rights described in the Declaration are held to be based not simply on the decisions of the assembly that approved them, but on man’s very nature and his inalienable dignity as a person created by God.¹⁷

The inalienable rights at the heart of the Declaration of Independence are grounded in the same recognition.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

One thing that we need to re-affirm in today’s world is this: the dignity of each person is inalienable precisely because it is a gift from God. If human dignity were based only on consensus, it would not

be truly inalienable. It could be taken away by a majority vote or a court ruling. For human dignity to be truly inalienable, it must be based on something greater than consensus. It must be a matter of recognizing, respecting, and being bound to the order “written into” the universe by the Creator.

This means that we cannot veto the dignity of any group of human beings any more than we can veto the law of gravity. Though in different ways, both are written into the order of the universe. Any attempt to disregard the law of gravity in attempting to build a machine will have serious consequences for the prospects of mechanical success. Any attempt to disregard the dignity of human beings in building a society will have serious consequences for the prospects of peace. John Paul II affirmed this point when he said:

Unconditional and effective respect for each one's ... inalienable rights is the necessary condition in order that peace may reign in a society ... In a society where these rights are not protected, the very idea of universality is dead, as soon as a small group of individuals set up for their own exclusive advantage a principle of discrimination whereby the rights and even the lives of other are made dependent on the whim of the stronger.¹⁸

Pope Benedict affirmed the same point when he said:

The duty to respect the dignity of each human being, in whose nature the image of the Creator is reflected, means in consequence that the person can not be disposed of at will. Those with greater political, technical, or economic power may not use that power to violate the rights of others who are less fortunate. Peace is based on respect for the rights of all. Conscious of this, the Church champions the fundamental rights of each person.¹⁹

These words of the popes apply to the violence of slavery, for which our country paid a terrible price. They apply to the violence of Communist regimes — with which John Paul II had first hand acquaintance — for which many nations have paid a terrible price. And they apply to the violence of the Nazi regime — with which Benedict XVI had first hand acquaintance — for which the whole world paid a terrible price.

But how can we, while clearly seeing and condemning these violations of human dignity and rights in the past, fail to see how the same principles apply today?

Those with greater political, technical, or economic power may not use that power to violate the rights of others who are less fortunate. Yet, from individual decisions to national priorities and policies, that is precisely what we do: we disregard the dignity and rights of the less fortunate. We approve of, or accept, “the private choice between a woman and her doctor” to kill the most vulnerable members of our society. Then we wonder why our immigration policies and international relations are not more just, humane and compassionate. Apparently we do not see how the same principles are at stake in both.

We condemn as obviously mistaken the notion that an individual or state could have the right to choose slavery for another person in the 1800s, but we turn around and defend an individual’s right to choose abortion today. Then we wonder how racism — which deems a particular group of people to be unworthy of human dignity and respect — can still flourish in our world. Apparently we do not see how the underlying principles are the same in each case: *A small group of individuals [has] set up for their own exclusive advantage a principle of discrimination whereby the rights and even the lives of other are made dependent on the whim of the stronger.*

In his final World Day of Peace message, Pope Paul VI addressed the question of life in the womb, saying:

Over [the] field of nascent life Peace spreads its first protecting shield. It is a shield endowed with the softest protection, but a shield of defense and love. Accordingly we cannot fail to disapprove of each and every offense against nascent life...The mother's womb and the child's cradle are the first barriers that not only protect Peace as well as Life but also build Peace."²⁰

A choice for abortion is a choice to introduce violence at the very foundation of culture. We must recognize each such individual choice as a tragedy, worthy of our compassion, and in need of Christ's healing love. At the same time, we must not feign surprise to learn that the accumulation of millions of such individual choices has consequences for the fabric of our culture. With each school shooting, people express their surprise that the youth of today are capable of plotting and executing violence on an incredible and unheard of scale. But if they feel free to choose death for others, and to do so on what seems a massive scale, is it any more than a reflection of the culture of violence into which they have been born? We should not be surprised when children start to adopt the habits of their parents.

It is time for us to recognize that events like the Columbine and Virginia Tech shootings are the almost inevitable outcome of a culture that defends the right to choose death for others, and to do so on a massive scale. As Pope Benedict XVI said:

As far as the right to life is concerned, we must denounce its widespread violation in our society: alongside the victims of armed conflicts, terrorism and the different forms of vio-

lence, there are the silent deaths caused by hunger, abortion, experimentation on human embryos and euthanasia. How can we fail to see in all this an attack on peace? Abortion and embryonic experimentation constitute a direct denial of that attitude of acceptance of others which is indispensable for establishing lasting relationships of peace.²¹

Biblical wrongs have become modern rights. The decisions that we have made, both individually and collectively undermine peace at its very core: respect for the dignity of the human person. Now we are reaping the fruits of our choices: lack of peace as the brutal reality outside of us, and emotional turmoil as the anguish within us.

Peace comes from respecting the order written into the universe, the moral blueprint of creation. The dignity of each person is part of that blueprint. Peace, therefore, requires that we respect the dignity of each person. Every act of disrespect toward the dignity of the human person is both an act of violence and a seed of further violence.

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, we must recall the centrality of human dignity in our quest for peace.

“**W**here human rights are not respected, defended and promoted, where violence or fraud is done to man’s inalienable freedoms ... there true Peace cannot be.”

(Paul VI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1969)

“**A**society is just if it respects the fundamental rights of the human person. Moreover, the spirit of war rises and grows strong where the inalienable rights of man are violated.

(John Paul II, Message for World Day of Peace 1984)

“**L**et every Christian be committed to tireless peace-making and strenuous defence of the dignity of the human person and his inalienable rights.

(Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2007)

IV. The Little Way of Peace

“We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love.”

(Mother Teresa)

We live in a world that has compromised human dignity and rights — and therefore undermined the prospects for peace — in a variety of ways. Under the present circumstances, what can we do to return to God’s plan for the world, and increase the prospects for peace?

Reflecting on the time that followed the Second World War, Pope Paul VI said: “Everyone seemed ready to accept radical changes, in order to avoid new conflicts.”²² The price of change would be high. But the risks associated with accepting the status quo — the prospect of renewed hostility — were higher still. The change was worth the cost.

I think something similar could be said for the civil rights movement. People were faced with the prospect of radical changes in their thinking, feeling, acting, in the very organization of society. Change would require sacrifice, and the cost would be high. But accepting the status quo, and continuing to sacrifice the dignity of our brothers and sisters, was no longer an option. The change was needed, and the price was paid — by some more than others.

I wonder: can we muster that same kind of courage to face the challenge of peace today? Can we face the cost of a radical reorganization in the way we live our lives and say: the change is worth the cost? Nothing less will be needed if we are to be Messengers of Peace for the Third Millennium.

This involves discovering what moral forces are necessary for resolving positively the problem of peace. It is necessary to have ... the courage of peace.

(Pope Paul VI, Message for World Day of Peace, 1973)

A. The “Little Way”

What we *do* see on a computer or television screen is made up of thousands of small interactions and details that we *don't* see.

The same is true of violence and peace in the world: what we do see is made up of many small interactions that we don't see.

To be a messenger of peace in today's world, therefore, does not require a commitment to great deeds, or even the prospect of doing great deeds. What it requires is a commitment to let the peace of Jesus Christ flow into every nook and cranny of our lives, penetrating even our thoughts, desires and attitudes, and letting that peace flow through our every word and deed.

This is what I call “The Little Way of Peace.” Its patron is St. Therese of Lisieux, “The Little Flower,” who proposed the “little way” of love as the path to perfection. She said:

“Love proves itself by deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love.”

Mother Teresa was one of the great practitioners of this “little way” of love. What I want to propose is that we dedicate ourselves to cultivating a “little way” of peace.

The following words contain some wisdom that I think we can adapt and adopt on behalf of the little way of peace:

“Nonviolence is not some exalted regimen that can be practiced only by a monk or a master; it also pertains to the way one interacts with a child, vacuums a carpet, or waits in line. Whenever we separate ourselves from a given situation (for example through inattentiveness, negative judgments, or impatience), we “kill” something valuable. However subtle it may be, such violence actually leaves victims in its wake: ... people, things, one’s own composure, the moment itself... these small scale incidences of violence accumulate relentlessly, are multiplied on a social level, and become a source of the large-scale violence that can sweep down upon us so suddenly. One need not wait until war is declared and bullets are flying to work for peace ... A more constant and equally urgent battle must be waged each day against the forces of one’s own anger, carelessness, and self-absorption.”²³

These words are inspired by the Buddhist tradition of non-violence. They are, perhaps, a good example of how “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men”²⁴ can sometimes be found in the traditions of other religions.

But if we are willing to confess that these words contain a seed of truth, we must also be willing to bring that seed to full flowering in Jesus Christ. How? By letting the peace of Jesus Christ flow into our hearts, and letting it flow out of us in all that we think and feel, say and do.

How do you interact with people when you are driving? How do you interact with your computer when something goes wrong? How do you interact with people when you are waiting in line at the grocery store or the bank? How do you react when things don’t

go your way?

Every situation, no matter how small, presents us with an opportunity to receive the peace of Jesus Christ, and to share it with the world around us. And every choice we make — to receive or reject that peace, to spread it or suppress it — is a contribution to building a culture of peace or a civilization of violence.

What can we do to repair the damage that has been done to the cause of peace in our world? How can we help to build a culture of peace? We can turn to Jesus and make our “little” contribution to peace day by day, moment by moment.

“**E**very person needs a ‘center’ in his life, a source of truth and goodness to draw from in the flux of the different situations of everyday life and its toil. Everyone of us, when he pauses for a moment of silence, needs to feel not only the beating of his own heart, but more deeply, the beating of a trustworthy presence, perceptible to the senses of faith and yet more real: the presence of Christ, heart of the world.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus Message, June 1, 2008)

B. The Way of Stewardship

“How can we fail to lament the incalculable outpouring of economic resources and human energies expended in order to preserve for each individual State its shield of ever more costly, ever more efficient weapons, and this to the detriment of resources for schools, culture, agriculture, health and civic welfare?”

(Pope Paul VI, Message for World Day of Peace, 1977)

Following the “little way” of peace can help to change the decisions we make about everyday matters in ways too numerous to mention. Among the many, however, I want to mention two that are particularly important.

The first concerns how we spend our time, energy, and money — the way of stewardship.

Many people point out, and lament, the fact that our national budget contains such large expenditures for weapons and the military. The expenditures include not only an enormous amount of money, but also a great deal of time and energy.

John Paul II called attention to this matter in a message early in his pontificate, saying:

Numerous countries are engaged in the painful struggle to overcome hunger, disease and underdevelopment, while the rich countries reinforce their position and the arms race continues to absorb unjustifiably resources that could be better used.²⁵

People ask, and I will ask with them: couldn't some of those resources be put to better use? What would happen if at least some

of that time, energy, and money were re-directed to caring for the poor, the sick, and the hungry? Even a small percentage would go a long way.

Along similar lines, people will point out and lament the fact that our state budget contains such large expenditures for prisons. Again, the cost is calculated not only in terms of money, but also in terms of time and energy. People ask, and I ask with them: couldn't some of those resources be put to better use? What would happen if at least a fraction of that time, energy, and money were re-directed to feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and caring for children in poverty? Even a small percentage would go a long way.

While lamenting what seems like a disproportionate use of national and state resources, many people also feel like those decisions are out of their hands. "It's not right. But what can I do?" is a common sentiment.

I understand that sentiment. But, in the spirit of the little way, I want to suggest that we bring the matter closer to home. What can we do?

Consider the question: how much time, energy, and money are spent in the state of Michigan every time there is a college football game? What would happen if we spent that much time, energy, and money every Saturday on feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless?

My point is not that college football is bad. Far from it! It is a great community tradition! Rather, my point is twofold:

- 1) Most of us make our own contribution to the problem of spending time, energy, and money on one thing, while other

things that desperately need our resources go begging. We cannot expect a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people” to make choices very different from those we make ourselves. Unless and until we, individually and as families, are willing to re-shape our priorities — even when it hurts — we cannot expect the broader situation to improve.

2) Let me re-phrase the question I asked above in a different light: What would happen if we took the same amount of time, energy, and money that we spend on game days and spent them, every other Saturday, on feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless? Our football tradition is a perfect example of what we can accomplish when the whole community mobilizes to make something a priority.

In his last message for the world day of peace, John Paul II noted: “When the common good is promoted at every level, peace is promoted.”²⁶ By the same logic, when the common good is not promoted at any level, peace is undermined.

There will be peace if each one of us works for the common good of all.

I think that leaves some questions for each and every one of us to ask:

-Does the way I use my time, energy, and money promote the common good? Or does it only promote my own good?

-What changes am I willing to make so that the common good receives a greater share of my attention?

“**A**t the origin of many tensions
that threaten peace are surely
the many unjust inequalities still
tragically present in our world.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2007)

C. The Way of the Family

There are many little ways that all of us, every day, can contribute to building a culture of peace. Among the many ways, I have called particular attention to the way of stewardship — how we use our time, energy, and money. Now I want to draw our attention to the way of the family.

In his 2008 message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Benedict XVI focused on the connection between peace within individual families and peace within the human family, saying:

The first form of communion between persons is that born of the love of a man and a woman who decide to enter into a stable union in order to build together a new family. But the peoples of the earth, too, are called to build relationships of solidarity and cooperation among themselves, as befits members of the one human family...The family is therefore rightly defined as the first natural society, a divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human person as the prototype of every social order.²⁷

Because it is the first form of community between persons, the family is an essential building block of peace. If there is peace within the community of the family, the prospects for peace in the community beyond the family are greatly improved. But if there is not peace within the community of the family, the prospects for peace in the community beyond the family are greatly reduced. As the Holy Father explains:

Indeed, in a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of

*youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them. For this reason, the family is the first and indispensable teacher of peace.*²⁸

The fundamental building blocks of peace are learned at the level of the family. Those who learn these lessons in the family can help to bring peace to the broader community. But if the building blocks of peace are not assembled within the family, then society has no foundation on which to build. Speaking of this connection between peace and the family, the Holy Father said:

*Consequently, whoever, even unknowingly, circumvents the institution of the family undermines peace in the entire community, national and international, since he weakens what is in effect the primary agency of peace. This point merits special reflection: everything that serves to weaken the family based on the marriage of a man and a woman, everything that directly or indirectly stands in the way of its openness to the responsible acceptance of new life, everything that obstructs its right to be primarily responsible for the education of its children, constitutes an objective obstacle on the road of peace.*²⁹

Therefore, as part of the little way of peace, I call on the faithful to make a “preferential option for the family.” This may entail a variety of things: an extra measure of time and energy for one’s spouse and children rather than work, an extra measure of patience with one’s spouse and children when you are tired, an extra measure of respect and obedience to one’s parents even when you don’t understand them, or an extra measure of sharing with one’s brothers and sisters.

For many families it may involve reclaiming some of the time

and energy that have been taken up by overly-busy schedules, and giving them back to God and family. For everyone, it will probably involve some measure of working through old resentments and healing old wounds in family relationships, and reshaping destructive patterns of relating to each other that have grown up through the years. It will not be easy!

But if we are frustrated with the violence in the world, and the warped patterns of relating to each other that give rise to violence, we must take the energy of that frustration and turn its force inward. We must ask: do I contribute to that, if only in small ways, within my own family? And can I help to heal that, if only in small ways, starting with my own family?

For all of us, this “preferential option for the family” will require some effort. But if we are really committed to peace, we need to begin at home. It may seem less dramatic than some other ways of protesting on behalf of peace, but it’s where we can make the biggest impact.

“**E**ducation for peace can then benefit also from a renewed interest in the everyday example of simple builders of peace at all levels: the individuals and families who by controlling their passions and by accepting and respecting each other gain their own inner peace and radiate it.”

(John Paul II, Message for World Day of Peace, 1979)

V. Peace as Gift and Task

“In a striking synthesis, Saint Augustine teaches that “God created us without our aid; but he did not choose to save us without our aid.” Consequently all human beings have the duty to cultivate an awareness of this twofold aspect of gift and task.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2007)

The first words Christ spoke to his Apostles after he rose from the dead were: “Peace be with you.” (Jn 20:19). What he gave as a gift after his Resurrection, he left as a task after his Ascension: the Apostles, with the help of the Holy Spirit, were to communicate Christ’s peace to others. Therefore, as the Holy Father points out,

“Peace is both gift and task.”³⁰

How can peace be both gift and task at the same time? A simple analogy can help us understand.

Our teeth were given to us without our consent. They are a gift, a built-in part of our human nature. Under normal circumstances, they will simply grow in on their own.

But those same teeth, which we initially received as a gift, cannot be maintained in good health without our cooperation. If we do not take their maintenance as a task, then what was initially given to us as a gift can decay and rot, becoming a source of great pain! If that happens, then good dental health can only be restored through drastic, sometimes painful, and inevitably costly measures.

The same is true of the moral blueprint of the universe, and the peace that is the fruit of living according to its logic. It is given to us as a gift and a task.

As a gift, the moral blueprint for peace has been written by God into human nature. In the Incarnation of the Son, the seed of peace has been planted in human history. In the giving of the Holy Spirit, the energy for peace is constantly renewed.

But these gifts, which provide the foundation for building a culture of peace, are also given to us as a task. If we do not cultivate the gifts then our relationships — with God and each other, with our inmost selves and with the world — will rot and decay, and become for us a source of great pain. Then, as we know all too well, peace can only be restored through drastic and costly measures, if at all. Therefore, as John Paul II said,

While peace is a gift, man is never dispensed from responsibility for seeking it and endeavoring to establish it by individual and community effort, throughout history. God's gift of peace is therefore also at all times a human conquest and achievement, since it is offered to us in order that we may accept it freely and put it progressively into operation by our creative will.³¹

I invite you all to become messengers of peace for the Third Millennium — not only in the great and heroic acts that make headlines, of the news, but in the many small and mostly unnoticed acts that make up the fabric of daily living.

After all, the Lord Jesus himself said:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Mt. 5: 9)

“**W**ith confidence and filial abandonment let us lift up our eyes to Mary, Mother of the Prince of Peace. At the beginning of this New Year, let us ask her to help all God’s People, wherever they may be, to work for peace and to be guided by the light of the truth that sets man free (cf. Jn 8:32). Through Mary’s intercession, may all mankind grow in esteem for this fundamental good and strive to make it ever more present in our world, and, in this way, to offer a safer and more serene future to generations yet to come.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Message for World Day of Peace, 2006)

ENDNOTES

1. Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1984.
2. Pope Benedict XVI, Spontaneous comments, September 14, 2006.
3. Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, Advent Sermon to the Pontifical Household, Dec. 7, 2007
4. Pope Paul VI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1973.
5. Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 5.
6. "A Message from Mother Teresa of Calcutta" in *Come to Me in the Blessed Sacrament*.
7. Pope Paul VI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1970.
8. "In the final analysis, therefore, the fact of recourse to violence and war comes from man's sin, from his blindness of spirit and the disorder of his heart." Pope John Paul II, Message for World Day of Peace, 1984.
9. See Pope Paul VI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1969: "Peace must first be in men's minds, so that it can then exist in human events." See also the 1975 Message for the World Day of Peace: "Peace only has value to the extent that it seeks first to be interior before becoming exterior. Minds must first be disarmed if we wish effectively to stop the recourse to arms which strike bodies." See also John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1984: "It is in the face of these enormous problems that I propose the theme of a renewal of "heart." It may be thought that the proposal is too simple and the means disproportionate. And yet, if one reflects well on it, the analysis outlined here permits us to go to the very depths of the problem ... Humanity's helplessness to resolve the existing tensions reveals that the obstacles, and likewise the hopes, come from something deeper than the systems themselves." "[I]t is the heart of man that must be renewed in order to renew systems, institutions and methods."
10. "Peace is above all the result of the implementation of that design of wisdom and love, through which God willed to enter into supernatural relations with mankind." Pope Paul VI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1969.
11. ... "therefore, I heartily recommend to the Church's pastors and to the People of God the practice of eucharistic adoration, both individually and in community. Great benefit would ensue from a suitable catechesis explaining the importance of this act of worship, which enables the faithful to experience the liturgical celebration more fully and more fruitfully. Wherever possible, it would be appropriate, especially in densely populated areas, to set aside specific churches or oratories for perpetual adoration. I also recommend that, in their catechetical training, and especially in their preparation for First Holy Communion, children be taught the meaning and the beauty of spending time with Jesus, and helped to cultivate a sense of awe before his presence in the Eucharist." (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 67)
12. Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2006.
13. "Idem velle atque idem nolle — to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing — was recognized by antiquity as the authentic content of love: the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought. The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus

our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself. Then self- abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy (cf. Ps 73 [72]:23-28)." Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, #17.

14. Pope John Paul II asked: "Can history ever swim against the tide of conscience?" The context in which he asked the question made his answer clear: only for so long. (Memory and Identity, p. 74)

15. "This is why Christians, even as they strive to resist and prevent every form of warfare, have no hesitation in recalling that, in the name of an elementary requirement of justice, peoples have a right and even a duty to protect their existence and freedom by proportionate means against an unjust aggressor (cf. Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 79)." Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1982.

16. Pope Paul VI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1976

17. Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2007.

18. Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1982.

19. Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2007.

20. Pope Paul VI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1978.

22. Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2007.

22. Pope Paul VI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1971.

23. Kenneth Kraft, "Inner Peace, World Peace" from *Everyday Mind*.

24. *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

25. Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1984.

26. Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2005.

27. Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2008.

28. Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2008.

29. Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2008.

30. Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2007.

31. Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1982.

Prayer for Peace

*Lord Jesus Christ,
make us an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred let us sow love;
where there is offense, pardon;
where there is conflict, that we may build peace.*

*Oh Divine Master,
you taught us that whoever works for peace,
is called a child of God.
That with constancy we may establish justice and truth as
the foundation for peace, firm and long lasting.*

*Lord, you offer us peace as a gift and an
accomplishment that we need to realize with your help.
Give us the grace to welcome your peace;
help us to have attitudes of peace;
that our words be of peace;
that we realize works of peace;
and that we build the peace that each of us and the whole
world so desperately needs.*

Amen.

(Messengers of Peace - Pacem in Terris, Colombia)

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