

ACSJC Discussion Guide: World Day of Peace Message 2002

On the 1st of January each year the Pope issues a World Day of Peace Message. The theme of this year's Message is ***No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness***. It addresses the relationship between justice, forgiveness and peace in the light of international terrorism. The full text of the message can be found on www.vatican.va

This paper provides a brief summary of the message, some questions for discussion, and resources to promote prayer for peace.



WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE 2002: No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness

A SUMMARY

The Pope has begun 2002 with a message of hope that, in a world where evil seems to have the upper hand, true peace will prevail. He acknowledges the profound feelings of personal vulnerability and fear for the future that so many people have been experiencing in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks, and asks "*how do we restore the moral and social order subjected to such horrific violence?*" His answer is that the shattered order can only be fully restored by a response that combines justice with forgiveness. Justice and forgiveness are the pillars of true peace and the theme of this Message.

Peace is the Work of Justice

Justice and forgiveness are not irreconcilable opposites: forgiveness is the opposite of resentment and revenge, not of justice. John Paul reminds us that true peace is the fruit of justice, which ensures full respect for rights and responsibilities, and the just distribution of benefits and burdens. Because human justice is never perfect, it must include, and be completed by forgiveness, which heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundations. This is true at all levels of relationships from the personal to international relations.

Forgiveness does not mean overlooking the need to right the wrong done. Forgiveness is the fullness of justice and it leads to a tranquility of order that is more than a temporary cessation of hostilities. It involves the deepest healing of the wounds that fester in human hearts. Justice and forgiveness are both essential to such healing.

The Reality of Terrorism

Today peace born of justice and forgiveness is under assault by international terrorism.

John Paul suggests that terrorism is built on contempt for human life. It commits intolerable crimes, and because it uses terror as a political and military means, it is a crime against humanity. The death wish that feeds terrorism is clearly shown when terrorist organizations use their own followers as weapons to be launched against defenceless and unsuspecting people. Terrorism springs from hatred, and it generates isolation, mistrust and closure. Violence is added to violence in a tragic sequence that exasperates successive generations, each one inheriting the hatred which divided those that went before.

The Pope affirms that communities have a right to defend themselves against terrorism, but cautions that this right must always be exercised with respect for moral and legal limits in the choice of ends and means. We need to correctly identify the guilty because criminal culpability is personal, and cannot be extended to the nation, ethnic group or religion to which terrorists may belong.

Where rights are trampled on and injustices are tolerated over a long period of time, it becomes easier to recruit terrorists. International cooperation in the fight against terrorist activities must include a political, diplomatic and economic commitment to relieving situations of oppression and marginalisation.

None of this excuses acts of terrorism. In fact the terrorist claim to be acting on behalf of the poor is false. The victims of the breakdown of order which terrorists aim to achieve include, above all, the people of the developing world, who are least able to withstand a collapse of international solidarity.

Faith & Terrorism

Addressing the role of religion in terrorism, the Pope notes that terrorism is often an outcome of fundamentalism. Terrorists hold that their beliefs or the sufferings which they have undergone are so

absolute that their reaction in destroying even innocent lives is justified. Truth however, can never be grasped perfectly nor imposed on others. To try to impose what we consider to be the truth on others by violent means is an offence against human dignity, and ultimately an offence against God, whose image that person bears. Terrorism exploits God as well as people. This is why, what is usually referred to as fundamentalism is an attitude radically opposed to belief in God.

No truly religious leader can condone terrorism or preach it. It is a profanity to do so.

The Need for Forgiveness

Because God has been merciful to us, followers of Christ can and must be merciful to others. This is first of all a personal choice not to repay evil with evil. Forgiveness starts in people's hearts before it becomes a social reality. Only to the extent that an ethics and a culture of forgiveness prevail can we hope for a politics of forgiveness. A politics of forgiveness would be expressed in society's attitudes and laws, so that through them justice would take on a more human character.

Although the source of forgiveness is divine it can also be understood from human experience. We all hope to be able to start over again rather than being trapped forever in our mistakes and guilt. Why wouldn't we be able to offer to others what we hope for from them?

Although forgiveness is a personal initiative, people are essentially social beings and are situated within a pattern of relationships through which they express themselves. Families, groups, societies, States and the international community also need forgiveness so that ties that have been broken may be renewed and situations of mutual condemnation and the temptation to discriminate against others may be overcome. The ability to forgive lies at the very basis of the idea of a future society marked by justice and solidarity.

Forgiveness is not weakness. It demands great spiritual strength and moral courage – both in granting it and in accepting it – and it leads to a fuller, richer humanity. While forgiveness involves an apparent short-term loss for a real long-term gain, violence opts for an apparent short-term gain but involves a real and permanent loss.

Turning to the Arab/Israeli conflict, the Pope says that the continuous recourse to acts of terror and war aggravate the situation and diminish hope on all sides. They must give way to a negotiated solution in which the rights and demands of each party are taken into proper account and balanced in an equitable way. This is possible if and where there is a will to let justice and reconciliation prevail.

Interreligious Understanding & Cooperation

Religious leaders have a weighty responsibility in working together to eliminate the social and cultural causes of terrorism by stressing the dignity of the human person and the oneness of the human family. The Pope calls on Jewish, Christian and Islamic religious leaders to publicly condemn terrorism and to deny terrorists any kind of religious or moral legitimacy by bearing common witness to the truth that the deliberate murder of the innocent is a grave evil always, everywhere, and without exception.

Prayer for Peace

The Pope has invited representatives of the world's religions to join him in Assisi on 24 January to pray for peace. Prayer for peace is not an afterthought. It is essential to peace building. By praying for peace we open our hearts to God's power to renew all things. To pray for peace is to pray for justice, for a right ordering of relations within and among nations and peoples. It is to pray for freedom, especially for the religious freedom that is a basic human and civil right of every individual. To pray for peace is to seek God's forgiveness, and to implore the courage to forgive those who have trespassed against us.

To believers and unbelievers, to all people of good will, to those responsible for the future of the human community, to those who nourish feelings of hatred, a desire for revenge or the will to destroy, the Pope sends the message: no peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness.

The Pope concludes by calling for more intense prayer for the victims of terrorism, for their families, for all those who continue to be hurt by terrorism and war, and even for terrorists themselves.

The full text of the World Day of Peace Message can be found at www.vatican.va

Questions for Discussion:

- 1 What is your experience of peace, justice and forgiveness? Perhaps you have recently offered or received forgiveness. Was this linked with some action to put the situation right and create justice? Was real peace achieved?
- 2 What is your vision for peace: in your own life; your family; your local community; Australian society; the world? Describe in words or images what true peace could be like.
- 3 Groups and societies, like individuals, need forgiveness and justice in order to achieve peace. Pope John Paul II recently asked the forgiveness of Indigenous Australians for the Church's part in the removal of children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent from their Indigenous families. How can this request for forgiveness help to achieve justice and peace in Australia?
- 4 There are no excuses for terrorism, but there may be explanations. How does this message explain terrorism? Do you agree?
- 5 How can we respond to terrorism in a way that combines justice and forgiveness?
- 6 Choose one of the quotes from the World Day of Peace Message on the right. Why does it appeal to you?
- 7 Religion is often misused to lend legitimacy to violent acts. How can you, as a person of faith, foster the truth?
- 8 Praying for peace is essential to peace building. It opens our hearts to God's power to renew all things. What is your experience of praying for peace?

Quotes from the Pope's Message

In the present circumstances, how can we speak of justice and forgiveness as the source and condition of peace? We can and we must, no matter how difficult this may be; a difficulty which often comes from thinking that justice and forgiveness are irreconcilable. But forgiveness is the opposite of resentment and revenge, not of justice. In fact, true peace is the 'work of justice' (Is 32: 17). n 3

True peace is the fruit of justice, that moral virtue and legal guarantee which ensures full respect for rights and responsibilities, and the just distribution of benefits and burdens. But because human justice is always fragile and imperfect ... it must include and, as it were, be completed by the forgiveness which heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundations. n 3

... no religious leader can condone terrorism, and much less preach it. It is a profanation of religion to declare oneself a terrorist in the name of God, to do violence to others in his name. Terrorist violence is a contradiction of faith in God, the Creator of man, who cares for man and loves him. n 7

... the failure to forgive, especially when it serves to prolong conflict, is extremely costly in terms of human development. Resources are used for weapons rather than for development, peace and justice. What sufferings are inflicted on humanity because of the failure to reconcile! What delays in progress because of the failure to forgive! Peace is essential for development, but true peace is made possible only through forgiveness. n 9

International cooperation in the fight against terrorist activities must also include a courageous and resolute political, diplomatic and economic commitment to relieving situations of oppression and marginalisation which facilitate the designs of terrorists. The recruitment of terrorists in fact is easier in situations where rights are trampled upon and injustices tolerated over a long period of time. n 5

All human beings cherish the hope of being able to start all over again, and not remain forever shut up in their own mistakes and guilt. They all want to raise their eyes to the future and to discover new possibilities of trust and commitment. n 8

Prayers for Peace

Prayer of St Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much
seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Daily Prayer for Peace

To the Creator of nature and humanity, of truth and beauty, I pray:

Hear my voice, for it is the voice of the victims
of all wars and violence
among individuals and nations;

Hear my voice for it is the voice of all children
who suffer and will suffer when
people put their faith in weapons and war;

Hear my voice when I beg you to instill
into the hearts of all human beings
the wisdom of peace, the strength of justice,
and the joy of fellowship;

Hear my voice and grant insight and strength
so that we may always respond
to hatred with love,
to injustice with total dedication to justice,
to need with the sharing of self,
to war with peace.

O God, hear my voice and grant unto
the world your everlasting peace.

Pope John Paul II

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) is the national social justice and human rights agency of the Catholic Church in Australia. It advises the Bishops on social justice issues in Australia and overseas; undertakes research and advocacy on such issues; educates the Catholic community about the Church's social justice teachings and their application; and facilitates the development of social justice networks within the Catholic Church in Australia.

The ACSJC is made up primarily of lay people and its membership is drawn from each of the ecclesial provinces of Australia. The ACSJC is responsible to the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference through the ACSJC Chairman, who is also a member of the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace (BCJDP). Two other members of the BCJDP also sit on the ACSJC along with the BCJDP's Executive Secretary who is an ex officio member of the ACSJC.

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