

ACSJC Discussion Guide: World Day of Peace Message 2006

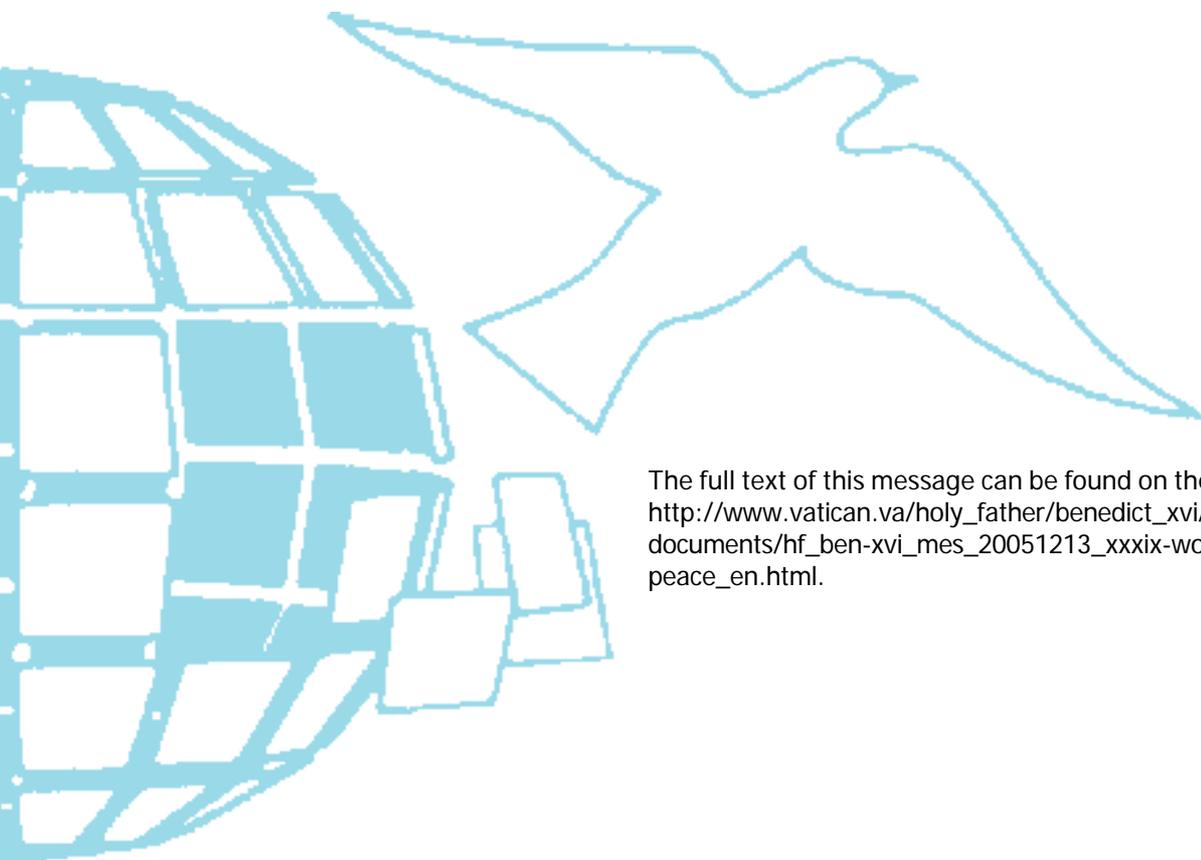
The Holy Father delivers a message on New Year's Day each year for the World Day of Peace.

This tradition was begun by Pope Paul VI in 1968. His intention was to deliver a message that would be a source of hope for Christians and all people of the world.

2006 is the occasion of Pope Benedict XVI's first World Day of Peace message. The theme he chose is *In Truth, Peace*.

This discussion guide consists of:

- a brief discussion of the Pope's message
- some points for reflection and discussion
- a prayer
- a guide to additional resources.



The full text of this message can be found on the Vatican's website:
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20051213_xxxix-world-day-peace_en.html.

WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE FROM POPE BENEDICT XVI

Pope Benedict XVI's first World Day of Peace message begins with a tribute to his predecessors, Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, who 'constantly invited everyone to make God the starting-point of their efforts on behalf of concord and peace throughout the world.'

He emphasises the commitment of the Holy See to continue serving the cause of peace. In fact, he says, the very name he chose (the name both of the patron saint of Europe and of the great Pope Benedict XV) is a sign of his personal commitment to peace.

The Pope offers greetings and good wishes to all, especially those who are suffering as a result of violence and armed conflict.

'In truth, peace'

The Holy Father begins by explaining the meaning of the theme of this year's message - *In truth, peace*. People naturally set out on the path of peace when they are enlightened by 'the splendour of truth'. Peace is not simply an absence of conflict; it is the result of God's own design for human society - 'the harmonious coexistence of individual citizens within a society governed by justice.'

Peace is a divine grace, and with that grace we can all work to bring our world closer to God's heavenly plan. Whenever people are hindered in their development, whenever their rights are denied or they suffer injustices, there can be no peace.

Saint Augustine described peace as 'the tranquillity of order' - that is, a situation that enables the truth about all people to be respected and realised.

'Who and what, then,' the Pope asks, 'can prevent the coming of peace?' Lying and falsehood, which are at the root of the idea of sin itself, have had 'devastating effects on the lives of individuals and nations.' False ideology and political systems have 'wilfully twisted the truth and brought about the exploitation and murder of an appalling number of men and women, wiping out entire families and communities.'

Any authentic search for peace must begin with the realisation that the problem of truth and untruth is the concern of every man and woman; it is decisive for the peaceful future of our planet.
[Par. 5]

Everybody has a yearning for peace, and finding peace means finding ways of repairing relationships that have been poisoned by untruth.

As individuals, in our communities and among nations, we are all members of the same family and have a common destiny. We are in conflict with this truth if we seek to emphasise differences in history and cultural identity in a way that undermines the peace and unity of the human family.

The truth of peace calls upon everyone to cultivate productive and sincere relationships; it encourages them to seek out and to follow the paths of forgiveness and reconciliation, to be transparent in their dealings with others, and to be faithful to their word ... Jesus is the truth which gives us peace. [Par. 6]

Peace - even in the midst of war

Even in the midst of war, we can seek peace. One way of doing this is to observe and strengthen international law, which limits the consequences of war.

International humanitarian law is 'one of the finest and most effective expressions of the intrinsic demands of the truth of peace'. New developments in conflicts and in weapons technology continually appear, and this challenges us to update international law so that it can deal with those developments.

The Holy Father pays tribute to the people and organisations who apply this law and to the soldiers engaged in peacekeeping operations throughout the world. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, such soldiers 'should look upon themselves as guardians of the security and freedom of their fellow-countrymen ... they too contribute to the establishment of peace.'

Terrorism

Terrorism represents a dramatic rejection of the truth of peace. Like his predecessors, the Pope condemns terrorism's 'senseless and deadly strategies.' He quotes Pope John Paul II: 'Those who kill by acts of terrorism actually despair of humanity, of life, of the future.' Elsewhere, John Paul wrote: 'To try to impose on others by violent means what we consider to be the truth is an offence against the dignity of the human being, and ultimately an offence against God in whose image he is made.'

Terrorism is most frequently associated with nihilism, fanaticism and fundamentalism. 'Nihilism denies God's existence and his provident presence in history, while fanatical fundamentalism disfigures his loving and merciful countenance', the Holy Father says.

Because of the risks humanity faces, Catholics everywhere have a duty to proclaim and embody the truth of the 'Gospel of Peace'. 'God is the unfailing source of the hope which gives meaning to personal and community life.' When we realise this, we become witnesses to 'the God who is inseparably truth and love' and put ourselves at the service of peace in cooperation with other Christians and all men and women of good will.

Other threats to peace

There are some signs of hope. There are 'a few, very tentative steps along the path of peace': there are fewer armed conflicts, and some initial moves towards peace in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Nevertheless, devastating conflicts remain: in many places, war, civil conflict and unresolved divisions can flare up at any moment. In particular, some governments incite international hostility and put at risk the efforts of those working towards peace.

The Holy Father denounces the move towards nuclear weapons and calls for nuclear disarmament by all nations - including those that possess them openly or secretly and those that are planning to acquire them.

The truth of peace requires that all... agree to change their course by clear and firm decisions, and strive for progressive and concerted nuclear disarmament. [Par. 13]

Growth in military expenditure and the international arms trade are challenges to the cause of peace and restrict the development of all people, especially the poor.

How can there ever be a future of peace when investments are still made in the production of arms and in research aimed at developing new ones? [Par. 14]

'The first to benefit from a decisive choice for disarmament,' he says, 'will be the poor countries, which rightly demand ... implementation of their right to development.' This right was recently reaffirmed by the United Nations, and the Pope calls for a renewal of the UN that would restore its authority and give it the capacity to deal with new challenges - especially the challenge of globalisation. In turn, he says, the Church is committed to proclaiming everywhere 'the Gospel of peace'.

Seeking peace through the Gospel

Finally, Pope Benedict points us all towards the message of the Gospel. 'When we hear the Gospel, dear brothers and sisters,' he says, 'we learn to build peace on the truth of a daily life inspired by the commandment of love.' Every community is invited to undertake 'an extensive process of education and witness aimed at making everyone more aware of the need for a fuller appreciation of the truth of peace.'

He urges all Christians to pray for peace - to seek the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Prince of Peace and to assist all people to strive for the truth of peace in our world and for future generations.

For reflection and discussion

Whenever the integral development of the person and the protection of his fundamental rights are hindered or denied, whenever countless people are forced to endure intolerable injustices and inequalities, how can we hope that the good of peace will be realised? [Par. 4]

We need to regain an awareness that we share a common destiny which is ultimately transcendent, so as to maximise our historical and cultural differences, not in opposition to, but in cooperation with, people belonging to other cultures. These simple truths are what make peace possible; they are easily understood whenever we listen to our own hearts with pure intentions. [Par. 6]

All Catholics ... have a duty to proclaim and embody ever more fully the 'Gospel of Peace', and to show that acknowledgment of the full truth of God is the first, indispensable condition for consolidating the truth of peace. [Par. 11]

God is the unfailing source of the hope which gives meaning to personal and community life. [Par. 11]

In Truth, Peace can be divided into four parts.

- The first part is a spiritual and theological discussion of the meaning and value of the bond between peace, truth and lies.
- The second part considers peace in the context of real situations of war.
- The third part considers the truth of peace in relation to terrorism.
- The fourth part considers the truth of peace from the point of view of the need to relaunch the political process of disarmament.

Some questions

- 1 Benedict's message is titled *In Truth, Peace*. From your reading of this message, what does this title mean?
- 2 How can we 'make God the starting-point of [our] efforts on behalf of concord and peace throughout the world'? (Par.2)
- 3 *Any authentic search for peace must begin with the realisation that the problem of truth and untruth is the concern of every man and woman; it is decisive for the peaceful future of our planet. (Par.5).*
Can you recall an experience when speaking or living the truth eventually brought you peace?
- 4 *Peace is an irrepressible yearning present in the heart of each person. (Par.6).*
How is this yearning expressed in your life? For whom do you want peace?
- 5 *The truth of peace calls upon everyone to cultivate productive and sincere relationships; it encourages them to seek out and to follow the paths of forgiveness and reconciliation, to be transparent in their dealings with others, and to be faithful to their word. (Par.6).*
What is your experience of forgiveness and reconciliation? Perhaps in offering or receiving forgiveness, you have maintained a relationship. How did this bring peace?

Let us pray ...

Through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Prince of Peace,
may we be guided in our work for peace
by the light of the truth that sets us free.

Acknowledging and understanding that peace
is above all a gift of God,
may we build peace
on the truth of a daily life inspired by the commandment of love.

As we strive to make peace ever more present in our world,
may we become attentive and generous disciples of the Lord,
and may we offer a safer and more serene future
to generations yet to come.

Amen

Other resources

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council publishes regular pamphlets, position papers, background papers and other publications supporting the cause of peace. Among them are:

- *Ten Steps Towards Cultivating A Culture of Peace* and prayer card.
- *Justice Trends* (the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council's quarterly newsletter).
- *War on Iraq: Is it Just?* (2003) Bruce Duncan, CSsR (Catholic Social Justice Series No. 47).
- *The Peace of God* (1995) Dr Paul Rule (Australian Catholic Social Justice Council Occasional Paper No. 23).

A number of Christian organisations dedicated to action for peace have websites with useful links and resources:

- The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council's website (www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au) contains links to a number of organisations committed to national and world peace.
- The website of the National Council of Churches in Australia (www.ncca.org.au/dov) has a page devoted to cultivating peace and overcoming violence.
- Pax Christi Australia (www.paxchristi.org.au) is a Christian peace movement with branches in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland and individual members throughout Australia.

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) was set up by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference (ACBC) in 1987 as the national justice and peace agency of the Catholic Church in Australia. The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference mandates the ACSJC to promote research, education, advocacy and action on social justice, peace and human rights, integrating them deeply into the life of the whole Catholic community in Australia, and providing a credible Catholic voice on these matters in Australian society. In this way the ACSJC seeks to bring good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed. The ACSJC is accountable to the ACBC through the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace.

The major responsibilities of the ACSJC are:

- researching issues and monitoring trends in public policy and current affairs in Australia and overseas
- presenting Catholic Social Teaching and the social justice tradition of the Catholic Church
- applying Catholic Social Teaching to current social justice, human rights, development and peace issues in Australia and overseas
- speaking out against injustice, the abuse of human rights, poverty and violence and in favor of change for a more just society and thereby ensuring a credible national Catholic voice on these issues
- promoting a spirituality of justice and the integration of concern for social justice into the liturgy, worship and general life of the whole Church
- building social justice networks within the Catholic Church, encouraging local action, coordinating action at the national level and maintaining contact with relevant international Catholic agencies
- collaborating with national and international agencies with objectives similar or complementary to those of the ACSJC
- witnessing to and promoting unity among Christians through ecumenical action in favour of justice and peace
- educating the Catholic and wider community on social justice, human rights, development and peace issues in Australia and overseas by providing guided experience and educational materials
- advising the Bishops on statements and actions for justice and peace.

building
social justice networks

researching
policy

educating
on issues

presenting
Catholic Social teaching

promoting
a spirituality of
justice

advocating
change

© Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
This ACSJC Discussion Guide may be reproduced in its entirety with appropriate permission and acknowledgement.
ACSJC Discussion Guide: World Day of Peace Message 2006
March 2006

ACSJC
Phone 02 9956 5811
Fax 02 9954 0056
Email admin@acsjc.org.au
Website www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

PO Box 1615 Street North Sydney NSW 2060 Australia

