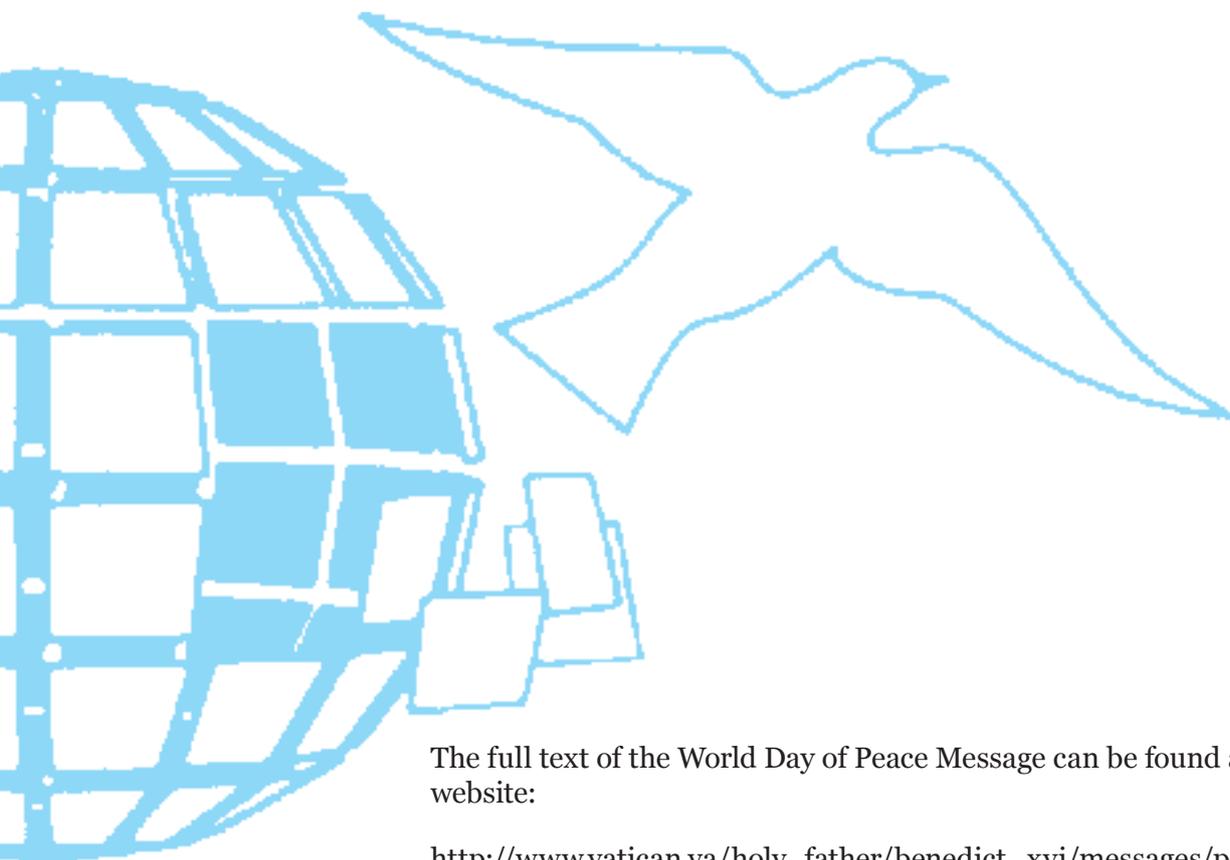


ACSJC Discussion Guide: World Day of Peace Message 2007

On 1 January, the Holy Father delivered his World Day of Peace message. This papal message to Christians and all people of the world has been given each year since 1968.

The theme of Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 World Day of Peace Message is *The Human Person, The Heart of Peace*.

Each year, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council issues a brief discussion guide to help promote the Pope's message. This guide consists of a brief overview of the message, some points for reflection and discussion, and a prayer.



The full text of the World Day of Peace Message can be found at the Vatican website:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace_en.html

WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE FROM POPE BENEDICT XVI

In his second World Day of Peace message, Pope Benedict states that an authentic understanding of the human person is only realised through respect for the dignity and peace the Creator intended for the human family. An authentic humanism will acknowledge that the human person is the 'heart of peace'.

Each person, created in the image of God, has been given the abilities of self-knowledge, self-giving and communion with others. It is the calling of all people, therefore, 'to mature in the ability to love and contribute to the progress of the world, renewing it in justice and in peace'.

Peace is both a gift and a task

Peace between individuals and the peoples of the world is a gift from God – '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'. This gift of peace demands a response from every one of us.

Justice, according to standards for individual action and solidarity with one another, reflects the design of God and the full potential to be achieved by individuals and the entire human family. But the call to live together in peace and build relationships of justice and solidarity does not come through some external or abstract set of demands or laws. Rather, it is the very nature of the human condition to engage in the task of working for peace – this is part of human nature and of the divine plan.

Striving for an authentic peace

The Holy Father outlines a range of conditions or critical issues that need to be addressed for the attainment of an 'authentic peace'. These concern the dignity of each human being and all people of the world.

Work for future generations

At a time when many around the world are oppressed by war, violence and need, the Holy Father calls to mind the children of the world – especially those whose future is compromised by exploitation and harm. Their suffering, he says, intensifies the call to work for justice and peace and heightens our concern for the wellbeing of future generations.

I invoke peace upon children, who by their innocence enrich humanity with goodness and hope, and by their sufferings compel us all to work for justice and peace. (Par.1)

Defend and promote fundamental rights

The Pope reaffirms that 'the Church champions the fundamental rights of each person'. The Church has a concern for those who are vulnerable to having their rights violated by individuals or groups with greater political or economic power.

A particular concern is to promote 'respect for the right to life at every stage' and 'the free expression of personal faith in God'. The widespread violation of these rights, through armed conflict, terrorism, hunger, abortion, sectarian violence and religious persecution, is condemned.

Continuing global inequalities in access to essential goods and services that should be at everyone's disposal have caused severe poverty. The scarcity of food, water, shelter and healthcare in entire regions like Africa is the cause of 'persistent inequalities' that pose a real threat to world peace.

Pope Benedict condemns the exploitation of women and challenges cultural systems in which the dignity and fundamental freedoms of women are 'subordinated to the arbitrary decisions of men'. The exploitation of women is an affront to the personal dignity 'impressed by the Creator upon every human being'.

Respect the natural and human ecology

[H]umanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology. Experience shows that disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence, and vice versa. (Par.8)

There is growing evidence of ‘an inseparable link’ between peace with creation and peace among the human family. The Holy Father points to how ‘the destruction of the environment, its improper or selfish use, and the violent hoarding of the earth’s resources cause grievances, conflicts and wars, precisely because they are the consequences of an inhumane concept of development’.

Beware of ideologies of hatred

The significance and realisation of fundamental human rights is wedded to the ‘common transcendental dignity’ of each person and cannot simply be subject to the ‘power of man’. The work for peace ‘must be guided by a vision of the person untainted by ideological and cultural prejudices or by political and economic interests which can instil hatred and violence’. In particular, the Holy Father warns against racist ideologies and of concepts about God that promote violence and war.

This is a point which must be clearly reaffirmed: war in God’s name is never acceptable! When a certain notion of God is at the origin of criminal acts, it is a sign that that notion has already become an ideology. (Par.10)

Develop a full appreciation of the human person

‘A true and stable peace presupposes respect for human rights,’ the Pope says. Respect for human rights demands a full appreciation of each person being created by God and having a permanent dignity.

Pope Benedict warns against a trend to regard fundamental rights as negotiable or the human person as having changing levels of dignity and rights depending on the demands of the time or changing world opinion. He calls on organisations like the United Nations ‘not to lose sight of the natural foundation of human rights’, which will ensure they maintain the authority to defend human rights and protect the vulnerable peoples of the world.

Protect civilians from violence and war

War always represents a failure for the international community and a grave loss for humanity. When, despite every effort, war does break out, at least the essential principles of humanity and the basic values of all civil coexistence must be safeguarded. (Par.14)

Recent conflicts, like that in south Lebanon, show that international humanitarian law protecting civilians and helping innocent victims is increasingly ignored. The Pope calls on the international community to reaffirm this law and, in the face of terrorism, consider ‘the ethical limits restricting the use of modern methods of guaranteeing internal security’.

Noting with dismay the desire of some nations to acquire nuclear weapons, he says ‘the way to ensure a future of peace for everyone is found not only in international accords for the *non-proliferation of nuclear weapons*, but also in the determined commitment to seek their reduction and definitive dismantling.’

We all have a part to play

Pope Benedict makes an urgent plea that all Christians be committed to peace and defending the dignity of the human person.

Jesus has revealed to us that ‘God is love’ (1 Jn 4:8) and that the highest vocation of every person is love. In Christ we can find the ultimate reason for becoming staunch champions of human dignity and courageous builders of peace. (Par.16)

For reflection

As one created in the image of God, each individual human being has the dignity of a person; he or she is not just something, but someone, capable of self-knowledge, self-possession, free self-giving and entering into communion with others. At the same time, each person is called, by grace, to a covenant with the Creator, called to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his place.

(Par.2)

A fundamental element of building peace is the recognition of the essential equality of human persons springing from their common transcendental dignity ... it is a good that cannot be ignored or scorned without causing serious repercussions which put peace at risk. (Par.6)

The Christian will tirelessly implore from God the fundamental good of peace, which is of such primary importance in the life of each person. Moreover, he will be proud to serve the cause of peace with generous devotion, offering help to his brothers and sisters, especially those who, in addition to suffering poverty and need, are also deprived of this precious good. (Par.16)

Questions for discussion

1. The title of Pope's message is *The Human Person, The Heart of Peace*. After reading this message, what does the title mean to you? What particular issues raised in the message inspire or challenge you?
2. The Pope identifies the following areas for action: concern for future generations; promoting human rights; respecting the ecology; being aware of ideologies of hatred; developing a full appreciation of the human person; protecting victims of violence and war. How do we, as individuals and in our parishes and schools, work for peace in these areas?
3. *If it is true that peace between individuals and peoples calls for unfailing commitment on our part, it is also true, and indeed more so, that peace is a gift from God* (Par.3). Are there any issues at the global or national level or in our own communities that cry out for God's gift of peace? As Christians, what can each of us offer in building relationships of justice and solidarity?

Let us pray

To the Queen of Peace,
the Mother of Jesus Christ 'our peace' (*Eph 2:14*),
I entrust my urgent prayer for all humanity at the beginning of the
year 2007,
to which we look with hearts full of hope, notwithstanding the
dangers and difficulties that surround us.
May Mary show us, in her Son, the Way of peace,
and enlighten our vision, so that we can recognise Christ's face
in the face of every human person, the heart of peace!

Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace message, 2007

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council is the national social justice and human rights agency of the Catholic Church in Australia. It advises the Bishops Commission for Justice and Service 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.

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