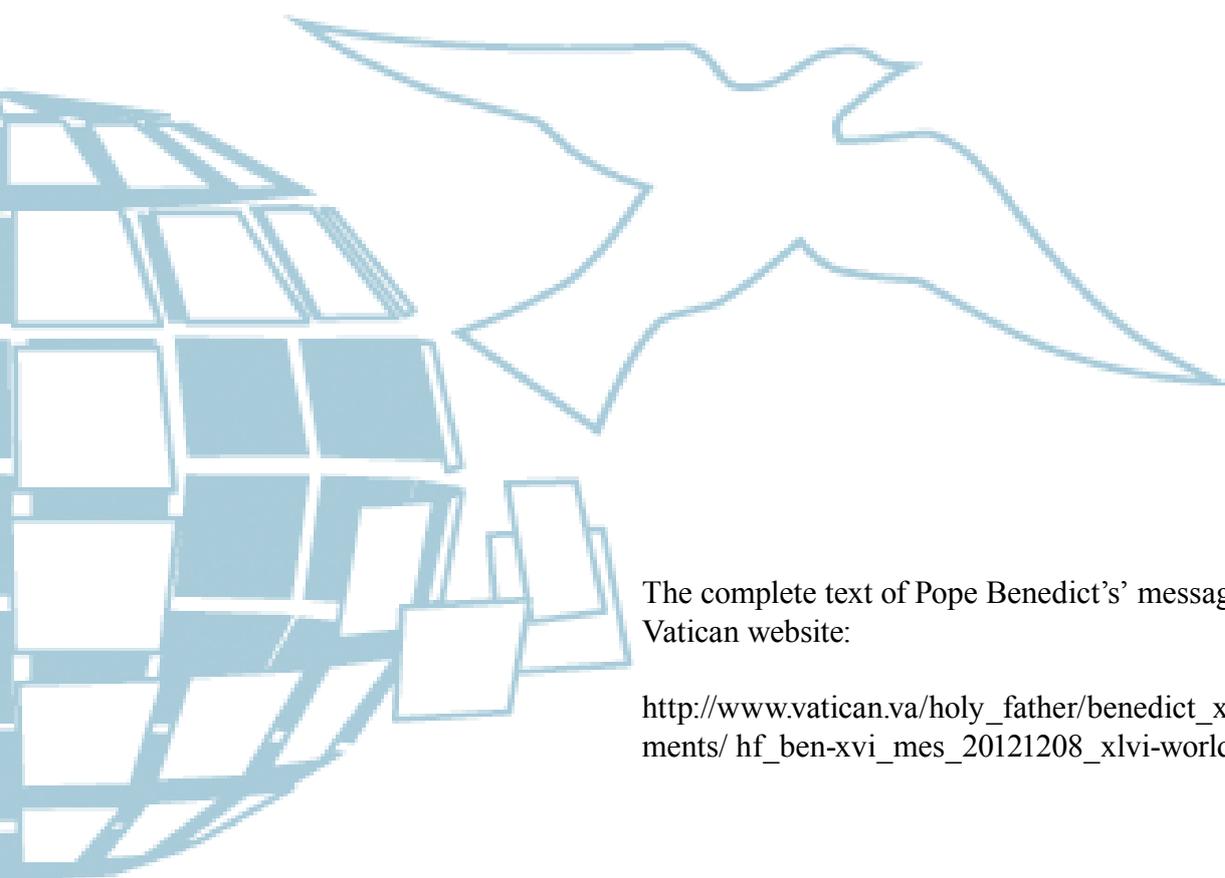


ACSJC Discussion Guide: World Day of Peace Message 2013

Pope Benedict XVI delivered his World Day of Peace Message On New Year's Day, 2013. A papal message to Christians and all people of the world has been given each year since 1968.

The theme of Pope Benedict XVI's 2013 Message for Peace is *Blessed are the Peacemakers*.

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



The complete text of Pope Benedict's' message can be found at the Vatican website:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20121208_xlvi-world-day-peace_en.html

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

The theme of Pope Benedict XVI's 2013 Message for the World Day of Peace is *Blessed are the Peacemakers*

This year's message reminds us that our commitment and our ability to pursue peace flow from the inner peace we experience through our relationship with Christ. This inner peace impels us to go beyond ourselves to put into practice our belief in the dignity of every person, created in God's image and endowed with fundamental rights and responsibilities.

In every person the desire for peace is an essential aspiration which coincides in a certain way with the desire for a full, happy and successful human life. (#1)

The Pope notes that in these times, marked by globalisation and ongoing violent conflicts and threats of war, there is need for a shared commitment to work for the common good and holistic development of all people. He affirms the many different efforts at peacemaking around the world and points to these as testament to all people's desire for peace, and our need of the peace which is God's gift.

All of this led me to draw inspiration for this Message from the words of Jesus Christ: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' (Mt 5:9).(#1)

CONTEXT

Pope Benedict links this year's message to two significant events whose 50th anniversaries occur this year. One is the Second Vatican Council:

Fifty years after the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, which helped to strengthen the Church's mission in the world, it is heartening to realize that Christians, as the People of God in fellowship with him and sojourning among mankind, are committed within history to sharing humanity's joys and hopes, grief and anguish, as they proclaim the salvation of Christ and promote peace for all. (#1)

The second anniversary is of Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which urged all people to help build a world that respects human dignity and is directed toward the common good. That message is still needed today as selfishness and injustice give rise to inequality and conflict.

It is alarming to see hotbeds of tension and conflict caused by growing instances of inequality between rich and poor, by the prevalence of a selfish and individualistic mindset which also finds expression in an unregulated financial capitalism. (#1)

GOSPEL BEATITUDE

Several times the Pope refers to peace as a gift of God and the result of human effort.

Jesus' beatitude tells us that peace is both a messianic gift and the fruit of human effort. In effect, peace presupposes a humanism open to transcendence. (#2)

The beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus (Mt 5:3-12 and Lk 6:20-23) are not just moral exhortations:

Rather, the blessedness of which the beatitudes speak consists in the fulfilment of a promise made to all those who allow themselves to be guided by the requirements of truth, justice and love. (#2)

Continuing this theme, the Pope refers to *Pacem in Terris* to emphasise this important point.

Peace concerns the human person as a whole, and it involves complete commitment. It is peace with God through a life lived according to his will. It is interior peace with oneself, and exterior peace with our neighbours and all creation. Above all, as Blessed John XXIII wrote ... it entails the building up of a coexistence based on truth, freedom, love and justice. (#3)

Peace is possible when we are aware of and work with the spiritual call to peace and put it into practice by working to build a better world.

Peace is not a dream or something utopian; it is possible. Our gaze needs to go deeper, beneath superficial appearances and phenomena, to discern a positive reality which exists in human hearts, since every man and woman has been created in the image of God and is called to grow and contribute to the building of a new world. (#3)

PEACEMAKERS LOVE, DEFEND AND PROMOTE LIFE IN ITS FULLNESS

The Pope names all people who respect life as peacemakers.

True peacemakers, then, are those who love, defend and promote human life in all its dimensions, personal, communitarian and transcendent. Life in its fullness is the height of peace. (#4)

This includes those who protect life from its beginnings, in its relationships and in the social structures created to further the development of all people. 'How could one claim to bring about peace', he asks, 'without defending the life of those who are weakest, beginning with the unborn?'

Pope Benedict also affirms several fundamental human rights. One is the right to religious freedom – not only freedom *from* restrictions on religious practice but also freedom *for* bearing witness to one's religion. Another is the right to work, increasingly under threat from a concept of development that 'is thought to depend principally on completely free markets'.

A NEW MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS

On a global scale, building peace necessitates creating a new model of economic development. The Pope gives an outline of what this new economic model might look like.

... peacemakers are those who establish bonds of fairness and reciprocity with their colleagues, workers, clients and consumers. They engage in economic activity for the sake of the common good and they experience this commitment as something transcending their self-interest, for the benefit of present and future generations. Thus they work not only for themselves, but also to ensure for others a future and a dignified employment. (#5)

The Pope also signals the importance of food security and the role humans play in managing its production and distribution.

The issue of food security is once more central to the international political agenda, as a result of interrelated crises, including sudden shifts in the price of basic foodstuffs, irresponsible behaviour by some economic actors and insufficient control on the part of governments and the international community. (#5)

EDUCATION FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE: THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND INSTITUTIONS

In calling for ongoing education of future peacemakers the Pope again draws together work for peace and concern for the common good.

I wish to reaffirm forcefully that the various peacemakers are called to cultivate a passion for the common good of the family and for social justice, and a commitment to effective social education. (#6)

A PEDAGOGY FOR PEACEMAKERS

Finally the Pope calls for the development of 'a pedagogy of peace'.

This calls for a rich interior life, clear and valid moral points of reference, and appropriate attitudes and lifestyles. Acts of peacemaking converge for the achievement of the common good; they create interest in peace and cultivate peace. (#7)

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Which parts of the Pope's message touched your understanding of peace?

Which parts gave you a new insight into the meaning of peace?

Where do you find inner peace? How are you called to carry this peace into the world?

What is your understanding of 'peace: God's gift and the fruit of human effort'?

What is the connection between peace and the common good?

Who are the peacemakers in your life?

RESOURCES

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Social Justice Statement 2012-13, *The Gift of Family in Difficult Times: The social and economic challenges facing families today* (available on the ACSJC website: www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au).

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Social Justice Sunday Statement 2010, *Violence in Australia: A message of peace* (available on the ACSJC website: www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au).

J Ferguson, H Kearins, D Brennan, *Reading the Signs of the Times: A basic introduction to Catholic social teaching*. Catholic Social Justice Series No. 70, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (2011).

PRAYER

God of Truth and Justice,
you call us to live in right relationship with you,
with one another,
and with all of creation.

Made in your image, we thirst for justice.
Distracted by false images,
we seek material goods and artificial status.
We do not use your creation fairly or well.

Open the minds of this adult generation
to see the destruction caused by greed.
Let us not hold back from seeing
the hardship of others
caused by the unfair distribution of earth's resources.

May we acknowledge our part in this misery,
and take whatever steps we can to change it.

Open the hearts of young people
to also see a true picture of the world we live in.
May they have courageous and honest teachers
to assist them to see what is happening in their world,
locally, nationally and globally.

May they learn to make sound judgements
and, together with others animated by Jesus, the Just One,
Take action to bring the world
to the peace and justice you desire for it.

building
social justice
networks

researching
policy

educating
on issues

presenting
Catholic teaching

promoting
a spirituality of
justice

advocating
change

© Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. This Australian Catholic Social Justice Council discussion guide may be reproduced in its entirety with appropriate permission and acknowledgement.

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

Phone 02 8306 3499

Fax 02 8306 3498

Email admin@acsjc.org.au

Website www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

PO Box 7246 Alexandria NSW 2015

