

New Resolutions. A Call for Peace!

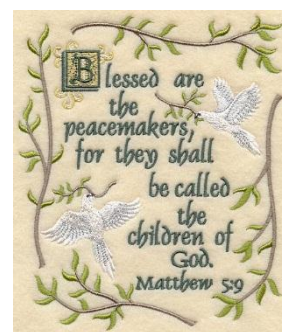
For each of us the last year has brought either joys or sorrows or a mixture of both. There is no doubt too that there has been tragic events that have caused us all to stop and reflect on the future. It is impossible in the face of such tragedy and barbaric acts as those that saw the slaughter of 130 children in Pakistan not to be aware of the imperative of both praying for and of acting in peace. A new year brings with it hopes and fears, aspirations and often a desire for change or improvement. These desires can sometimes be phrased as 'New Year resolutions'. These can sometimes focus on the mundane, less of this or more of that, or a real intention to lead a better life.

All that makes us want to improve in some way or other are positives and not to be demeaned. However surely our call as Christians is not only to better ourselves or improve our lot but to reach out to others and improve the circumstances of other people's lives. The number of Charities that abound are witness to this fact that we are all brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ and that the love he bears for us spills over into the love we have for others. Great service is performed by countless people in order to attain some easing of the lives of others. Whether this is done by fund raising or action, all things gather together to be of use.

Should we feel that this is enough? Well there is a more profound way that we can achieve a fairer and just society. There are major issues facing our world which require a deeper understanding of what brings about change and improvement. Yes aid, development, charity, all play their part but one essential element must be present in order to bring about the peace that mankind longs for, peace in our families, societies cultures and nations. But no peace is ever attained unless it pre-exists in our hearts. If we look at the lives of those who have made a significant contribution

to peace we usually find those who are peacemakers in their own situation or whose longing for peace leads them out of their own comfort zones to attain it for others.

Toward the end of the last year **Pope Francis** addressed the European Union and made a speech which resulted in a standing ovation. This speech was only briefly related in the media but deserves careful reading and understanding. The focus of it centres on Truth and Peace and the service of others especially the poor, marginalised refugees and the environment...



"The contemporary world offers a number of other challenges requiring careful study and a commitment, beginning with the welcoming of migrants who immediately require the essentials of subsistence, but more importantly a recognition of their dignity as persons. Then, too, there is the grave problem of labour, chiefly because of the high rate of young adult unemployment in many countries but also for the dignity of work.

It is my profound hope that the foundations laid for a new social order and economic cooperation, free from ideological pressures, capable of confronting a globalised world while at the same time encouraging the sense of solidarity and mutual charity thanks to the generous efforts of hundreds of men and women that the Catholic Church considers 'Saints' who over the centuries, have worked to develop the continent(s) both by entrepreneurial activity and by works of education, welfare and human promotion. These works above all represent an important point of reference for the many poor people living in Europe. How many of them there are on our streets! They ask not only for the food for survival, which is the most elementary right, but also for a renewed appreciation of the value of their own lives which poverty obscures and a discovery of the dignity that is conferred by work.

This however is not merely a social charter for he also says *'that peace is not merely an absence of war, conflicts and tensions, In a Christian vision peace is at once a gift of God and the fruits of free and reasonable human acts aimed at pursuing common good in truth and love... with respect for justice for everyone. (Extract)*

In order to respond to this call we must first root out of our own lives and heart those things that make it difficult to make sound judgments, based not on prejudice and fear but only on the facts that can be gleaned or and an understanding of each situation. It is indeed difficult today to find out what is the truth of any situation as we are constantly bombarded with conflicting information but it can be found by prayerful reflection and by seeking the truth. Patience is often required and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Nothing can be achieved when the bottom line is the strident maintaining of our own ideas without listening to the voices of other and discerning a way forward that brings peace to others as well as ourselves. Sometimes this requires sacrifice on our part. Sometime this requires us to speak our views in a spirit of truth and always love but always with the intention of maintaining peace and harmony as well as truth.

Our world is torn apart by violence and the pursuit of wealth at the expense of others who are our brothers and sister. There can be no place for the kind of violence that we have seen in recent years that leaves whole nations destroyed, families broken and death all around. It is easy to simply 'switch off' from the information because it is simply too painful to witness and too disturbing to face the realities of what is happening. Jesus so often used the words especially when he was aware of the fears of his followers and said *'do not be afraid'* it is difficult to speak of peace and harmony when many seek revenge. Yet we have examples of courageous people who have lost their lives by going out to serve others in war zones or by helping those who are sick. Yes, we admire them but we are all called in our own circumstance to open our eyes and heart when our neighbour needs help. This may need courage or determination but we have Jesus' promise that he is always with us. It is especially difficult to speak out when the comment will be ill-used and rejected which involve moral issues of the day. But have we really any choice? Peace is not brought about by silent consent to evil. Peace is not brought about by burying ones head in the sand hoping that all will go away. Peace can also be hard work gaining an inch at a time of reconciliation and forgiveness.



Interior peace of course too is essential to promote peace. We all need strengthening and we are truly blessed to be able to receive the Bread of Life. In the same way the Sacraments help to focus and refocus our lives and to make amends when we ourselves have not been peacemakers or have been at fault in an argument of disagreement. The Sacrament of Reconciliation enables us to start again when we have failed. It is well named for we both 'confess' our failure and are reconciled with our weakness and at one with God the Father. This Sacrament now so little used in some parts of the world is surely a means to interior peace. So too, are the other Sacraments, which give meaning and purpose to our lives. Prayer cannot be anything but central if we are to be truth- filled and peace-filled followers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We often see peace as some unreachable goal only for idealists and the naïve. We feel that the goals to maintain our lifestyle or getting on with ordinary things is all we can manage. In this aim we exert often huge amounts of time and effort whereas the dimensions that would enable us to achieve so much more in every respect are forgotten. Partly this is because the Gospel has faded from our lives in all the hurly-burly of the everyday.

So this is a plea, a thought, a suggestion for a *New Year Resolution*. Jesus said that peacemakers are blessed. Can this new year lead us to better understand what this really means? Can we, dare we, be led by this to continually strive for peace in our own situations and circumstances. Dare we open our Bibles to the Word of God to ask what this truly requires of us? Be amazed!

Pope Francis ended His speech with the following: *In this world, following the example of Christ and despite the sins of His son and daughters, the Church seeks nothing other than to serve and to bear witness to the Truth. This spirit alone guides us in supporting the progress of humanity.*

Blessings to all for a Peaceful New Year

Halina Holman

Prayer for Peace... Lord make me a channel of your peace. Where there hatred let me sow love, where there is injury pardon and where there is doubt true faith in you.

Feast days in January. 1st. World Peace Day and the Solemnity of the Mother of God.

6th Epiphany (celebrated on the 4th England)

11th. Baptism of the Lord. 19th-25th. Week of prayer for Christian Unity. 24th St Francis de Sales.

26th Sts. Timothy and Titus. 31st St Don Bosco

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