

Non-violence is the key to peace

Reflection of Archbishop Jean-Claude Hollerich, the President of Justice & Peace Europe, on Pope Francis' Message for the 50th World Day of Peace "Non-violence: a style of politics for peace"

There's a saying that the first casualty of war is truth.

This is very precise, because God is truth. God is peace. To live 'in Christ' is to live in peace. God wants us to live in peace.

Obviously, to live in peace, actually means to have a pretty difficult and challenging life – there's a lovely paradox for us there. God wants us to learn, to evolve, and to grow our compassion in other people. And yet, he wants us always to be in a loving relationship with him, and with our brothers and sisters in humankind. But how can we learn and expand, if our truth is not challenged? How can we forgive, if we are not sinned against? How can we truly love, if there is no need, no void to fill? To live in peace, we must sacrifice ourselves over and over again, and this does not always satisfy the ego.

So, what do we even know about truth and peace? What do we know to be true, based on Scripture, Tradition and on the human experience?

We know that Jesus did not live in peaceful times. The Old Testament can be seen as a long list of wars, family feuds, extraditions and genocides. Jesus wasn't exactly born into a peaceful tradition. But he was born into a tradition that strove for peace. He was born into a tradition of beautiful poetry, of love expressed in a million different ways, and he was born into the loving family of peacemakers like Ruth and Mary, who knew that *Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss*.

We know that there is no such thing as a win-able war. This is our human experience. Every time a life is lost by the hand of another human being, we all lose. As children of God we are one, and we desperately need each other. We need unity and diversity, both of which are damaged every single time a life is lost. We know this to be true in our experienced life and it has been reiterated again and again in scripture.

We know that justice does not come through retaliation and we know that Jesus' approach to every problem he faced, was a non-violent approach. Non-violence is the tool he gave us, the key to peace. The only key to unlocking conflict. We need to follow his example of love and charity.

We know that *The Lord gives strength to his people, the Lord blesses his people with peace*.

We know that *Blessed are the peacemakers* and catechism teaches us that respect for and development of human life require peace. Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is "the tranquillity of order." Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity.

So, as we are here today in times of extreme tension, when our truth is constantly challenged, and most of us are deeply concerned for the future of Europe and the world, let us look to He, who is the way, the truth and the life. What is he telling us, what is the sign of the times?

Some say that we are living in a new age of discovery and it is true, that a lot of the factors that were in play during the Renaissance of the 15th and 16th century, are also in play now. The unprecedented

development, the new discoveries and the focus on religion... It seems that now is the time for us to grow. In love and in truth. Now is the time to challenge ourselves, every time we criticise our fellow human beings, every time their opinion differ from ours, every time we are attacked for our opinions, and even when we are physically attacked as a society. Now is the time to challenge ourselves, when we decline to share. Now is the time to engage in dialogue, to show who we are and to point to non-violence, if not directly to Jesus.

We must have faith in the fact that God will pass judgement. We don't have to. What we have to do is to move forward, change situations, alter our ways of communicating, be the light in every difficult situation God puts us in. Stay true to God. Be creative in our quest for solutions, in moving forward the discussions. Let Him hold our hands and lead us, as He *is* the way and the truth and the life.

Billions of people have walked this path before us. Our ancestors did this. Think of your grandmother or whoever was the peacekeeper of your family, your school or your community. We are surrounded by peace-keepers, and our common Christian history is full of people who were challenged by God or their fellow human beings to stay true to what is right and just. As human beings, we are not inexperienced in this and we have so much history to draw on. So let us use it. Let us draw on our faith, on what we know to be true and what we know we can do as human beings. We have seen peace and love flourish again and again, and yet we tend to focus on wars. On conflict. But we cannot build peace by following a negative path. We must remember, that we are forever on our way to the New Jerusalem, and it's nearly here, but not yet. On this path, we must love peace and sacrifice our vices for it. John has a few words of encouragement for us:

Let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loves is born of God, and know God.
He that loves not knows not God; for God is love.
If we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us.

The truth is, God wants us to live in peace.

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