

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE PAUL VI
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE DAY OF PEACE

JANUARY 1st, 1972

Men of thought!
Men of action!
All mankind living in 1972!
Accept once more
our invitation to celebrate
the Day of Peace!

We take up again our reflection on Peace, for of Peace we have the loftiest conception: that of an essential and fundamental good of mankind in this world, that is, of civilization, progress, order and brotherhood.

We believe that the idea of Peace still is, and still must be, dominant in human affairs, and that it becomes all the more urgent whenever and wherever it is contradicted by opposite ideas or deeds. It is a necessary idea, an imperative idea, an inspiring idea. It polarizes human aspirations, endeavours and hopes. Its nature is that of an aim, and as such it is at the base and at the goal of our activities, be they individual or collective.

For that reason we think it extremely important to have an exact idea of Peace and to divest it of the false concepts which too often surround and thus deform and distort it. We say this to the young first of all. Peace is not a stagnant condition of life which finds in it at the same time both its perfection and its death. Life is movement, growth, work, effort and conquest, things such as these. Is that what Peace is like? Yes, for the very reason that it coincides with the supreme good of man as he makes his way through time, and this good is never attained totally, but is always being newly and inexhaustibly acquired. Peace is thus the central idea giving its driving force to the most active enthusiasm.

But this is not to say that Peace coincides with force. This we say especially to men in posts of responsibility. Since it is their interest and their duty to see that relations be normal between the members of a given group—a family, a school, a firm, a community, a social class, a city, a state—their constant temptation is to impose by the use of force such normal relations as bear the appearance of Peace. The ambiguous character of the social life which follows is torture and corruption for human spirits. A life of pretence is the atmosphere resulting sometimes from an inglorious victory, at other times from an irrational despotism, from a coercive repression, or from a balance of permanently opposing forces which are usually on the increase as they wait for a violent outburst which by devastation of every sort shows how false was the Peace imposed only by superiority of power and force.

Peace is not treachery.¹ Peace is not a lie made into a system.² Much less is it pitiless totalitarian tyranny. Nor is it, in any way, violence: though at least violence does not dare to appropriate to itself the noble name of Peace.

It is difficult, but essential, to form a genuine idea of Peace. It is difficult for one who closes his eyes to his innate intuition of it, which tells him that Peace is something very human. This is the right way to come to the genuine discovery of Peace: if we look for its true source, we find that it is rooted in a sincere feeling for man. A Peace that is not the result of true respect for man is not true Peace. And what do we call this sincere feeling for man? We call it Justice.

But is not Justice also an immobile goddess? Yes, it is so in the expressions of it which we call rights and duties, and which we arrange in our illustrious codes, that is, in laws and pacts which produce that stability of social, cultural and economic relationships which cannot be infringed. It is order, it is Peace. But if Justice, that is, what it is and what it should be, were to produce finer expressions beyond those now existing, what would happen?

Before answering, let us ask whether this hypothesis of a growth of consciousness of Justice is admissible, is probable and is desirable?

Yes.

This is the fact which characterizes the modern world and distinguishes it from the ancient. Today consciousness of Justice is increasing. No one, we believe, denies this phenomenon. We shall not pause here to analyze it: but we all know that today, because of the spread of culture, man, every man, has a new awareness of himself. Every man today knows he is a person; and he feels he is a person: that is, an inviolable being, equal to others, free and responsible—let us use the term: a sacred being. Since a different and better perception—that is, one which is fuller and more demanding—of the inward and outward flow of his personality, in other words, of his twofold moral movement of rights and duties, fills the consciousness of man, it is a dynamic Justice, and no longer a static Justice that is born of his heart. This is not simply an individual phenomenon, nor one reserved for select and restricted groups, it is now a collective and universal phenomenon. The developing countries shout it out with a loud voice. It is the voice of peoples, the voice of mankind. It demands a new expression of Justice, a new foundation for Peace.

Convinced as we all are of this irrepressible cry, why do we waste time in giving peace any other foundation than Justice?

As has been stressed by the recent Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, does there not still remain the task of establishing greater justice; both within national communities and on the international level? Is it just, for example, that there should be entire populations which are not granted free and normal expression of that jealously guarded right of the human spirit, the religious right? What authority, what ideology, what his-

¹ Cf. *Job* 15:21.

² Cf. *Jer* 6:14.

torical or civil interest can arrogantly claim a right to repress and stifle the religious sentiment in its legitimate human expression? We are not speaking of a superstitious, fanatical or disorderly expression. And what name shall we give to a Peace which claims a right to impose itself by trampling on this primary Justice?

And where other unquestionable forms of Justice have been injured or crushed—be they national, social, cultural or economic—could we be sure that the Peace resulting from such a tyrannical process is true Peace? That it is a stable Peace? Or, even if it be stable, that it is a just and human Peace?

Is not an integral part of justice the duty of enabling every country to promote its own development in the framework of cooperation free from any intention or calculated aim of domination, whether economic or political?

The problem is extremely serious and complex; it is not for us to make it worse, or to resolve it on the practical level. That is not within the competence of the one who is speaking here.

But it is precisely from this place that the invitation we give to celebrate Peace resounds as an invitation to practice Justice: "Justice will bring about Peace".³ We repeat this today in a more incisive and dynamic formula: "If you want Peace, work for Justice".

It is an invitation which does not ignore the difficulties in practising Justice, in defining it, first of all, and then in actuating, for it always demands some sacrifice of prestige and self-interest. Perhaps more greatness of soul is needed for yielding to the ways of Justice and Peace than for fighting for and imposing on an adversary one's rights, whether true or alleged. We have such trust in the power of the associated ideals of Justice and Peace to generate in modern man the moral energy to actuate them, that we are confident of their gradual victory. Indeed we are even more confident that on his own modern man has an understanding of the ways of peace, sufficient to enable him to become a promoter of that Justice which opens those ways and sets people travelling them with courageous and prophetic hope.

That is why we dare once again to extend an invitation to celebrate the Day of Peace in 1972 under the austere and serene sign of Justice, that is, with the burning wish to give life to deeds which will be convergent expressions of a sincere desire for Justice and a sincere desire for Peace.

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To our brothers and sons and daughters of the Catholic Church, we commend this our invitation. It is necessary to bring the men of today a message of hope, through a brotherhood which is truly lived and through an honest and persevering effort for greater, true Justice. Our invitation is logically connected with the message which the recent Synod of Bishops gave on "Justice in the World"; and it is strengthened by the certainty that "it is he"—Christ—"who is our peace".⁴

8th December 1971.

PAULUS PP. VI

³ Cf. *Is* 32:17.

⁴ Cf. *Eph* 2:14.