
LET US REMEMBER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001



On this anniversary day commemorating the horrible September, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, it is important to return to the Word of God to shed light on our mission of peace in the world. I would like to do this by referring to the message of Pope John Paul II for the 2002 World Day of Peace, "No Peace without Justice. No Justice without Forgiveness."

11 SEPTEMBER 2001

"On that day, a terrible crime was committed: in a few brief hours thousands of innocent people of many ethnic backgrounds were slaughtered. Since then, people throughout the world have felt a profound personal vulnerability and a new fear for the future. Addressing this state of mind, the Church testifies to her hope, based on the conviction that evil, the *mysterium iniquitatis*, does not have the final word in human affairs. The history of salvation, narrated in Sacred Scripture, sheds clear light on the entire history of the world and shows us that human events are always accompanied by the merciful Providence of God, who knows how to touch even the most hardened of hearts and bring good fruits even from what seems utterly barren soil. This is the hope which sustains the Church: that, by the grace of God, a world in which the power of evil seems once again to have taken the upper hand will in fact be transformed into a world in which the noblest aspirations of the human heart will triumph, a world in which true peace will prevail."

THE POPE'S PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Reflecting on the bloody September 11 episode, the Holy Father recalled the tragic events which marked his life, especially his earlier years: "The enormous suffering of peoples and individuals, even among my own friends and acquaintances, caused by Nazi and Communist totalitarianism, has never been far from my thoughts and prayers. I have often paused to reflect on the persistent question: *How do we restore the moral and social order subjected to such horrific violence?* My reasoned conviction, confirmed in turn by biblical revelation, is that the shattered order cannot be fully restored by a response that combines justice with forgiveness. *The pillars of true peace are justice and that form of love which is forgiveness.*

"WE CAN AND WE MUST!"

"But in the present circumstances, how can we speak of justice and forgiveness as a source and condition of peace? *We can and we must*, no matter how difficult this may be; a difficulty which often comes from thinking that justice and forgiveness are irreconcilable. But forgiveness is the opposite of resentment and revenge, not justice. In fact, true peace is 'the work of justice' (Is. 32:17). As the Second Vatican Council put it, 'the fruit of that right rendering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and which must be actualized by man thirsting for an ever more perfect reign of justice'. For more than fifteen hundred years, the Catholic Church has repeated the teaching of Saint Augustine of Hippo on this point. He reminds us that the peace which we can and must be built in this world is the peace of right order – *tranquillitas ordinis*, the tranquillity of order.

PEACE AND FORGIVENESS

“True peace therefore is the fruit of justice, that moral virtue and legal guarantee which ensures full respect for rights and responsibilities, and the just distribution of benefits and burdens. But because human justice is always fragile and imperfect, subject as it is to the limitations and egoism of individuals and groups, it must include and, as it were, be completed by the *forgiveness which heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundations*. This is true in circumstances great and small, at the personal level or on a wider, even international scale. Forgiveness is in no way opposed to justice, as if to forgive meant to overlook the need to right the wrong done. It is rather the fullness of justice, leading to that tranquillity of order which is much more than a fragile and temporary cessation of hostilities, involving as it does the deepest healing of the wounds which fester in human hearts. Justice and forgiveness are both essential to such healing.

TERRORISM DESPISES HUMAN LIFE

“It is precisely peace born of justice and forgiveness that is under assault today by international terrorism. In recent years, especially since the end of the Cold War, terrorism has developed into a sophisticated network of political, economic and technical collusion which goes beyond national borders to embrace the whole world. Well-organized terrorist groups can count on huge financial resources and develop wide-ranging strategies, striking innocent people who have nothing to do with the aims pursued by the terrorists. Terrorism springs from hatred, and it generates isolation, mistrust and closure. Violence is added to violence in a tragic sequence that exasperates successive generations, each one inheriting the hatred which divided those that went before. *Terrorism is built on contempt for human life*. For this reason, not only does it commit intolerable crimes, but because it resorts to terror as a political and military means it is itself *a true crime against humanity*.”

SELF-EXAMINATION

I urge you, alone or as a group, to examine the year gone by, in the light of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. In so doing we shall discover many points to challenge our conscience. If we cannot create a world of peace and forgiveness we shall reap a world of vengeance and bound on the most sophisticated arms race, a world in which none of us would be happy to live. “Loving Father, you gave us the world to protect and make it fruitful, help us carry out this task in filial obedience to you and in fellowship with our brothers and sisters.” Let us together and more than ever, carry out our mission of prayer for peace.

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