
HAPPY AND HOLY NEW YEAR 2004!



With you all I pray: "O Lord, bless the new year. Bring happiness to our friends and families. The year ahead is ours and is given us to earn eternal life." I can still see some parents following the old [French Canadian] tradition of blessing their children and wishing them everlasting life at the end of their days. However, all of us are invited to bless the Lord, that is, to "speak well" – *bene-dicere* – of God and of all those around us, and ask for them the best which Divine Providence can give. May the first day of 2004 truly be a day of blessing for everything we have experienced, and for everything we are about to live, throughout the year.

THREAT OF WAR

While ever since 1967 the first of the year has been dedicated, in our Church, as a special day of prayer for peace, the early days of 2003 were beclouded by the threat of war. At the highest diplomatic level there were ongoing exchanges between New York, Dublin, London, and Rome. At the Vatican, Pope John Paul II tirelessly repeated that war only served to increase violence. Never had activities on behalf of peace gathered so many together, throughout the cities of East and West; nations were asked to pursue peace negotiations. Youth and elderly, and whole families called for peace. At the United Nations, there were ongoing meetings with great numbers of delegates offering solutions. Despite all this, despite all the prayers made, murderous war broke out, and we know not yet where it will lead the whole of humankind.

ENDLESS WARS

On Remembrance Day Father Roger Dionne, V.G., Canadian Legion Chaplain, stated that our knowledge of past wars should give us a bit of wisdom, along with the strength and the know-how necessary to avoid all wars in the future. "More than ever our nation needs peacemakers. Unfortunately, mass media offer us a daily menu of wars and rumours of wars, scenes of violence, suicide attempts, armed reprisals and terrorist threats. One would be blind, not to realise that violence engenders more violence. However, even those who decide to go to war say that their objective is peace. Each time we wage war, we say it is the last, because once the enemy is vanquished and evil is destroyed, there will be peace in the land. But it seems that the enemy tends to multiply. It used to be nazism in Germany and communism in Russia. The enemy has now become North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Palestine, Serbia. It is now Iran, Syria, and especially Afghanistan and Irak. That is besides the wars in Africa which the media mention very little, perhaps because there are no Canadians or Americans directly concerned by those wars. Here in the West, Enemy Number One is terrorism which we must at all cost fight on all fronts. But for those on the other side of the world, in the Third World, the evil there is capitalism, globalization, and economic liberalism, because people there are their victims."

TENSIONS

If entire populations have come through the year 2003 under a cloud of war, we can say that the Catholic Church has had to go through difficult times, too. As much as Pope John Paul II's twenty-five years as pope and Mother Teresa's beatification made the headlines, to the same extent were several Church people smeared and slandered, in 2003, including several bishops and the Pope himself. The scandals of abuse by some of the clergy were the focal point of all media for months on end, to such an extent that it was always difficult to be fair towards those directly implicated, so much did emotions overwhelm reason and common sense. This could be seen at the time of the debates and manifestations regarding the new definition of marriage which the House of Commons in Ottawa wanted to adopt, when Church leaders were interviewed on this on both radio and television, how it was difficult to get the appropriate teaching and information out to the population. Some of my colleagues had to pay out of their own pockets for the complete publication of their pastoral message.

PEACEMAKERS

Throughout the year I have urged my baptised brothers and sisters to be peacemakers. And in this year of the fortieth anniversary of publication of Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* on peace, which has been quoted several times by Pope John Paul II, I pointed out the basic conditions of peace: Pope John wrote: "Truth is the basis of peace if every person becomes honestly aware that, besides his rights, there are also the rights of others. Justice will build peace if everyone concretely respect the rights of others and strive to accomplish their duty to others. Love will be the catalyst of peace if people consider the needs of others as their own and share with others what they have, beginning with spiritual values. Finally, liberty will nourish peace and help it produce its fruit if in the choice of means taken to achieve it, individuals follow reason and courageously take responsibility for their actions."

UNDER THE SIGN OF LIFE

What I find consoling, what rejoices me is the discovery that in the midst of all difficult moments we find young shoots that are full of life and hope. Shoots of truth and love, shoots of liberty and justice, these are major guideposts along our sometimes difficult daily path. "Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God!" May we have made strides in that direction, by December 2004! With all my heart I pray the Lord to grace you and yours with His abundant blessings throughout the year.

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