

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

**1 JANUARY 1974**

**PEACE DEPENDS ON YOU TOO**

Listen to me again, you who have arrived at the threshold of the new year 1974.

Listen to me again: I am before you making a humble entreaty, a strong entreaty.

Naturally, as you will have guessed, I wish to speak to you once more about Peace.

Yes, about Peace. Perhaps you think you know all there is to be known about Peace; so much has already been said about it by everybody. Perhaps this obtrusive term provokes a feeling of satiety, of boredom, perhaps also of fear that it conceals behind the charm of its name an illusory magic, an abstruse and over-indulged rhetoric, even a dangerous spell. The present moment of history, marked as it is by fierce outbreaks of international conflict, by implacable class warfare, outbursts of revolutionary freedoms, the crushing of human rights and fundamental liberties, and by unforeseen symptoms of worldwide economic instability, seems to be destroying the triumphant ideal of Peace as if it were the statue of an idol. In place of the pale and timid abstraction with which Peace seems to be marked in recent political experience and thought, preference is once more being given to the realism of facts and interests, and man is once more thought of as a permanently insoluble problem of living self-conflict: man is like this, a being who bears in his heart the destiny of fraternal strife.

In the face of this crude and re-emerging realism we propose not a purely notional concept of Peace, undermined by new and crushing experiences, but an indomitable idealism - that of Peace - destined for progressive affirmation.

Brethren, men of good will, wise men, men of suffering, believe our humble and repeated words, our untiring plea. Peace is the ideal of mankind. Peace is necessary. Peace is a duty. Peace is beneficial. It is not a fixed and illogical idea of ours; nor is it an obsession or an illusion. It is a certainty. Yes, it is a hope: it holds the key to the future of civilization and to the destiny of world. Yes, Peace.

We are so convinced that Peace is the goal of mankind in the process of its growing self-awareness and of the development of society on the face of the earth, that today, for the new year and for future years, we dare to proclaim, as we did last year: Peace is possible.

Basically, what compromises the stability of Peace and the movement of history in its favour is the unspoken and sceptical conviction that, in practice, Peace is impossible. A wonderful idea, people think, without putting it into words, an excellent synthesis of human aspirations, but a poetic dream and a utopian fallacy. An intoxicating drug, but enervating. There returns once again to men's minds, as though with inevitable logic, the thought that what matters is force; man will at best reduce the combination of forces to a balance of opposition, but organized society cannot do without force.

We must pause for a moment over this crucial objection, in order to clarify a possible misunderstanding: the confusion of Peace with weakness (not just physical but also moral), with the renunciation of genuine right and equitable justice, with the evasion of risk and sacrifice, with cowardly and supine submission to others' arrogance, and hence with acquiescence to enslavement. This is not real Peace. Repression is not Peace. Cowardice is not Peace. A settlement which is purely external and imposed by fear is not Peace. The recent celebration of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights reminds us that true Peace must be based on a sense of the untouchable dignity of the human person, from which arise inviolable rights and corresponding duties.

It is indeed true that Peace will accept obedience to just law and legitimate authority, but it will never be alien to considerations of the common good and man's moral freedom. Peace can also lead to serious sacrifices: in the struggle for prestige, in the arms race, in overlooking insults and in cancelling debts. It will even lead to the generosity of forgiveness and of reconciliation: but never by way of abject betrayal of human dignity, never by safeguarding selfish personal interests at the expense of others' legitimate interests, never by way of baseness. Peace will never be without a hunger and thirst for justice ; it will never forget the effort that has to be made in order to defend the weak, to help the poor, to promote the cause of the lowly Peace will never betray the higher values of. life in order to survive (cf. *Jn* 12: 25).

But this does not mean that Peace should be regarded as a utopia. The certainty of Peace is based not only on being but also on becoming. Like man's life, Peace is dynamic. Its realm extends more and principally into the field of moral obligation, that is, into the sphere of duties. Peace must not only be maintained; it must be produced. Therefore Peace is, and must always be, in a process of continuous and progressive realization. We shall go further and say: Peace is possible only if it is considered a duty. It is not even enough that it be based on the conviction, in general perfectly justified, that it is advantageous. Peace must take hold of the consciences of men as a supreme ethical objective, as a moral necessity, an *αὐτὴ βίη*, deriving from the innate demands of human coexistence.

This discovery, for this is what it is in the positive process of our reasoning, teaches us certain principles from which we ought never again to depart. And in the first place it enlightens us about the original nature of Peace: that Peace is above all an idea. It is an inner axiom and a treasure of the spirit. Peace must grow out of a fundamentally spiritual concept of humanity: humanity must be at Peace, that is, united and consistent in itself, closely bound together in the depth of its being. The absence of this basic concept has been, and still is, the root cause of the calamities which have devastated history. To regard struggle among men as a structural need of society is not only an error of philosophy and vision but also a potential and permanent crime against humanity. Civilization must finally redeem itself from the ancient fallacy, still existing and active: *homo homini lupus*. This fallacy has been at work from the time of Cain. Modern man must have the moral and prophetic courage to liberate himself from this inborn ferocity and to arrive at the conclusion which is precisely the idea of Peace as something essentially natural, necessary, obligatory and therefore possible. We must henceforth consider humanity, history, work, politics, culture and progress in terms of their relationship to Peace.

But what is the use of this spiritual, subjective, interior and personal idea? What is the use of such an idea, so defenceless, so remote from the actually lived, effective and frightening happenings of our present time? While the tragic experience of the last World War recedes into history, We unfortunately have to record the reappearance of a spirit of rivalry between the Nations as well as in the political dialectic of society. Today the potential of

war and struggle is far greater - not less - than that which was at mankind's disposal before the World Wars. Can you not see - any observer could object - that the world is moving towards conflicts even more terrible and horrible than those of yesterday? Can you not see the lack of effectiveness of propaganda for peace and the insufficient influence of the international institutions that were set up while the bloodied and weakened world was recovering from the World Wars? Where is the world going? Are not ever more catastrophic and abhorrent conflicts being prepared? Alas, We should hold our peace in the face of such pressing and implacable reasoning, as in the face of a desperate fate.

But no. Are we blind too? Are we ingenuous? No, brethren, we are certain that our cause, the cause of Peace, must prevail. In the first place: because in spite of the folly of a contrary policy, the idea of Peace is already victorious in the thought of all men in posts of responsibility. We have confidence in their up-to-date wisdom, their energy and ability. No head of a nation can today wish for war; every one yearns for the general Peace of the world. It is something great! We dare to exhort leaders never again to deny their programme, indeed the common programme, of Peace.

Secondly: it is ideas, far more and before particular interests, that guide the world, in spite of appearances to the contrary. If the idea of Peace effectively wins men's hearts, Peace will be safe; indeed it will save mankind. It is unnecessary for us in this our message to waste words in demonstrating the present-day power of the idea which has now become the thought of the People, that is, of public opinion. Today this thought of Peace is the queen that in practice rules the Peoples; her imponderable influence forms them and guides them; and it is the Peoples (that is, active public opinion) that rule the rulers. At least this is so to a large extent.

The third point: if public opinion is the element that determines the fate of the Peoples, the fate of Peace also depends on each of us. For each of us forms part of the civic body operating with a democratic system, which, in varying forms and degrees, today characterizes the life of the Nations organized in a modern manner. This is what we wished to say: Peace is possible, if each one of us wants it; if each one of us loves Peace, educates and forms his own outlook to Peace, defends Peace, works for Peace. Each one of us must listen in his own conscience to the impelling call: "Peace depends on you too".

Certainly individual influence on public opinion can only be infinitesimal, but it is never in vain. Peace lives by the support, though individual and anonymous, that people give it. And we all know how the phenomenon of public opinion is formed and expressed: a strong and serious statement can be easily disseminated. The affirmation of Peace must progress from being individual to being collective and communal; it must become the affirmation of the People and of the Community of Peoples. It must be translated into conviction, ideology and action; it must aspire to penetrate the thoughts and actions of the rising generation, and to penetrate the world, politics, economics, teaching, the future and civilization. It must do this not by instinctive fear of flight, but by the creative impulse towards future history and the reconstruction of the world; it must do so not by cowardice and egoism but by moral strength and increased love for mankind. Peace is courage, it is wisdom, it is duty; and in the end it is, even more, concern and happiness.

This is what we venture to say to you our brethren, to you men of this world who in any way are in control of its destiny, to you, men of command, men of culture, men of business: you must give to your action a strong and wise orientation towards Peace.

Peace has need of you. If you want to, you can succeed. Peace depends also and especially on you.

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And for our brothers and sisters in faith and charity we will reserve a word even more trusting and compelling. Do we not perhaps have our own original and superhuman possibilities of cooperating with those who are promoting Peace, and of making their efforts - our common efforts - efficacious, so that Christ, in accordance with the heatitude of the Gospel may call both them and us "sons of God"? (Cf. *Mt 5 : 9*). Are we not able to preach peace, above all else, to people's consciences? And who is more obliged than we are to be teachers of Peace by word and example? How shall we be able to lend our support to the cause of peace, in which man's causality reaches its highest level, except through insertion into the divine causality, ready to be invoked by our prayers? And are we going to be insensitive to the inheritance of Peace, transcendental and inexpressible Peace, which Christ and only Christ has left to us who live in a world which does not know how to give perfect Peace? Can we not, perhaps, reinforce our prayer for Peace with that humble and loving power which the divine mercy does not resist? (Cf. *Mt 7:7ff.*; *Jn 14:27*). It is a wonderful thing: Peace is possible, and furthermore it depends, through Christ our Peace (*Eph 2:4*), on us.

May our Apostolic Blessing of Peace be a pledge thereof.

*From the Vatican, 8 December 1973.*

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