

## Education Day 2019

(4<sup>th</sup> Sunday, September 22, 2019)

**“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”**

(Mt 5:9)

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Mt 5:9) Peacemaking refers to people who, having received the peace granted by God, live in the joy of the Holy Spirit, and make positive efforts to share and spread such spiritual peace among all others. Those peacemakers are blessed because they are in full communion with God, realizing the invaluable gift of “peace on earth to men of goodwill.”

### **What is “Peace”?**

In addition to this spiritual peace, Catholic teachings teach us that earthly “peace” is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ born to us, the messianic “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5)<sup>1</sup>. We know that “God is not a God of disorder but of peace.” (Cor I 14:33). Earthly “peace” does not only mean that there is no war, or just refer to the safety of persons, but is also actualized by such signs as present-day safeguards for the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of individuals and peoples, the assiduous practice of fraternity. Thus “peace” is “the tranquility of order”, and “the work of justice and the effect of charity.”<sup>2</sup>

### **“Peace” is Not the Rule**

Each of us is eager to seek God, willing to embark on the path of perfection and be in full communion with Him. Biblical accounts have revealed that whether Israelites could enjoy “peace” depends entirely on their relationship with God, especially if they truly observed the covenant they made with God (See Lv 26). What can destroy peace is not necessarily a war, but any incident that can destroy the good relationship between man and God—sin.<sup>3</sup> Sin is the cause of hatred, and hatred is the fruit of sin. If hatred between each other is not eliminated, sin will get in the way of “reconciliation” between man and God.<sup>4</sup> Let us briefly review our present situation in the light of some relevant teachings of the Church.

In recent months, there has been widespread violence, anger and hatred across Hong Kong. However, the Fifth Commandment of the Ten Commandments requires us to respect human life and human dignity. Our Lord asked for peace of the heart and denounced bloodletting anger and hatred as immoral when He commanded “You shall not kill.” Anger induces the desire to revenge,<sup>5</sup> thus destroying the relationship among men and that between man and God, because the Lord once said, “Whoever is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.” (Mt 5:22) “Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun set on your anger, and do not leave room for the devil.” (Ep 4:26-27)

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<sup>1</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 2305.

<sup>2</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 2304.

<sup>3</sup> Translated from 《聖經辭典》所載「和平」釋義，錄自思高聖經學會：《聖經辭典》，頁 371。

<sup>4</sup> Translated from 《聖經辭典》所載「和好」釋義，錄自思高聖經學會：《聖經辭典》，頁 370。

<sup>5</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 2302.

If anger and hatred are the consequences of sins, could the causes be associated with offences that violate the truth? The Eighth Commandment, "You shall not give false witness", forbids misrepresenting the truth in our relations with others because we are to be witnesses of God, and God is Truth. Jesus taught his disciples to love the truth unconditionally: "Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes', and your 'No' mean 'No'." (Mt 5:37) Therefore, offences against the truth express by word or deed a refusal to commit oneself to moral uprightness; and they are fundamental infidelities to God. Whether in interpersonal relations or through the mass media, to speak or to act against the truth is an offence, which seriously mars the harmonious relation of man to truth and to his neighbour, and also the fundamental relation of man and of his word to the Lord.

Likewise, could such anger, hatred and other evils also have derived from sins against "justice"? The teachings of the Church tell us that causing human casualties indiscriminately, violence imposed against the body and the spirit as a form of torture, including the deliberate destruction of limbs, etc., all despise humanity and human dignity and all violate the moral law.<sup>6</sup> Can we still enjoy a "stable and secure just order" if our neighbours, society, nation and the international community are filled with these counterparts of "truths" and "justice", which destroy relationships among men and that between man and God? Can we still enjoy "peace"? Amidst these turbulences and storms, if we are to preserve our spiritual peace, we must stay vigilant with the utmost faith and dependence in the Lord Jesus, who seems to be fast asleep on board.

## **The Desire for Peace**

Indeed, the value of peacemaking and the need for maintaining a good relationship with God are particularly evident today. Recently, Hong Kong society has become unstable owing to the political turmoil caused by the proposed amendment of the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance. However, on several occasions the melodious hymn, "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord", was heard being chanted by protestors. Demonstrators and participants of rallies loudly sang praises to and yearned for the "King of Peace", in whom they put their trust. Perhaps this temporary closeness to the Lord in the mind and heart gave people a brief moment of peace. However, the current situation soon became tense and deteriorated sharply. Though there were several massive peaceful marches and demonstrations since June, violent means of both protests and law enforcement have emerged and escalated continuously. Memories of scenes of violence have been haunting the vast majority of Hong Kong citizens, which have inevitably induced anxiety or agitation within them. How should Christians deal with such a major challenge in order to secure the "peace" they desire? This must be a question that every believer has been pondering upon.

## **The Foundation of Peacemaking**

Back in 1962, soon after the Berlin Wall was built during the cold war, the two nuclear-weapon superpowers, namely, the United States and the Soviet Union were confronting each other, triggering the Cuban missile crisis. Pope Saint John XXIII played a significant

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<sup>6</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church 2297.

role in the peaceful resolution of the crisis. In April of the following year, he promulgated the encyclical "Peace in the World" (*Pacem In Terris*), in which he talked about the relationships between men, between people and government, between countries, between countries and world organizations.

The encyclical calls upon all those "men of high principles" with good intentions to abide by the order God has set for human society and work for peace.<sup>7</sup> Although the text has been written for more than half a century, it is still very inspiring, "..... men of high principles, we must include the task of establishing new relationships in human society, under the mastery and guidance of truth, justice, charity and freedom..... for it is one which is able to bring about true peace in accordance with divinely established order....." "We are encouraged to hope that many more men, Christians especially, will join their cause, spurred on by love and the realization of their duty."<sup>8</sup>

"Truth", "justice", "love" and "freedom" are the four fundamentals of the "peace" of mankind. The encyclical says, "Yet peace is but an empty word, if it does not rest upon that order ..... set forth in the outline in this encyclical. It is an order that is founded on truth, built up on justice, nurtured and animated by charity, and brought into effect under the auspices of freedom."<sup>9</sup>

The encyclical consistently advocates that the relationships of daily life in conformity with a more human standard, are to be based on truth, tempered by justice, motivated by mutual love and holding fast to the practice of freedom. Therefore, the real social order is established only if the ruling authority embraces the notion that its power comes from the Creator, and the government, which is so constituted as to best meet the requirements of human nature, shares the authority of God in order to realize the common good. Similarly, a state's status, rights and duties, etc., and the relations between states, are to be dealt with and maintained in accordance with the above four major principles, namely, truth, justice, charity and freedom. Obviously, according to the encyclical, all these four elements are of the utmost importance for fostering peace and peaceful coexistence, with each of them being severally indispensable.

## Exploring Peace for Hong Kong Society

In the midst of chaos in Hong Kong, Christians should take the lead in creating peace. Cardinal John Tong has called on us to follow our Christian conscience as illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and to remain steadfast in our roles to alleviate damage caused by the Extradition Bill. The Church hopes that the government and people from all walks of life will together seek to resolve the current dilemma of Hong Kong through improved communication and mutual understanding, especially by listening patiently to young people's aspirations and demands, helping all those who are confused or lost to re-discover the goal and meaning of life.<sup>10</sup> As requested by the encyclical "Peace in the World", the faithful should walk with all people of good will to fulfil the role of Sons of

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<sup>7</sup> *Pacem In Terris* paragraphs 163.

<sup>8</sup> *Pacem In Terris* paragraphs 164-165.

<sup>9</sup> *Pacem In Terris* paragraphs 167.

<sup>10</sup> Hong Kong Catholic Social Communications Office "An appeal from Cardinal John Tong" 4.7.2019.

## Righteousness and Servants of Peace.

"Where the sheep are, there the shepherd is!" The Auxiliary Bishop of Hong Kong, Most Rev. Joseph Ha shared with us at a prayer meeting, "The shepherd is not only amidst the flock, but also has to guide them through interactions to come to know their own identity. It is also crucial to understand the difficulties and pains encountered by the flock." All who have come to the shepherds are to be accepted and all those who have left are to be reminisced, that is to say, the shepherds are to embrace all flocks that have come to him, and to track down any lost sheep. The loving care of the shepherds urges us not to abandon the ties between brethren, but to strive to love others as ourselves.

The guidance of the pastors makes us understand that people may have differences in their political views for the moment, but there is no lasting boundary of God's love because we are all brethren. The Vatican II Pastoral Constitution: "On The Church in The Modern World" (Gaudium Et Spes) states, "Since God the Father is the origin and purpose of all men, we are all called to be brothers. Therefore, if we have been summoned to the same destiny, human and divine, we can and we should work together without violence and deceit in order to build up the world in genuine peace." (para 92) Indeed, out of sincerity for the love of the truth, we should not refuse to talk to anyone. "'Respect' and 'love' ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through such courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them"<sup>11</sup>, in order to communicate in good faith within the Lord.

## Spiritual Care by Educators and Youth Workers

Catholic school education also contributes to peacemaking. When facing changes in society and in times, educators teach youngsters to adhere to the Five Core Values of "Truth", "Love", "Justice", "Life" and "Family". "Truth" teaches us to strive to maintain the capacity for seeking the truth, to distinguish between right and wrong, and true and false, and to be honest by telling the truth. "Justice" teaches us to uphold human dignity, to assume responsibility for each other, for the family and society, to respect the rights of others, and to establish fair, harmonious and reciprocal interpersonal relationships. "Love", connects us to all people and with each other in harmony. It transcends the strict measure of justice, and thus giving priority to helping the weak and marginalized people is taken to be an obligation. "Life" teaches us to respect the sacredness and preciousness of each individual's life and to work for the happiness and bliss of mankind. "Family" teaches us to be united and live in harmony with our family, to get along with each other, to live and grow in true loving care without reservation.<sup>12</sup>

The Vatican II Pastoral Constitution "On the Church in the Modern World" (Gaudium Et Spes) also mentions the mission of educators to create peace. "Those who are dedicated to the work of education, particularly of the young, or who mold public opinion, should consider it their weightiest task to instruct all in fresh sentiments of peace. Indeed, we all need a change of heart as we regard the entire world and those tasks which we can perform in unison for the betterment of our race." (para 82) Our educators should thus

<sup>11</sup> Vatican II Pastoral Constitution: "On The Church In The Modern World (Gaudium Et Spes)" para 28.

<sup>12</sup> Catholic Education Office "Vision & Mission of Catholic Schools" pamphlet.

always desire peace, uphold professionalism and ethics, and support each other. They should provide appropriate counselling for students and even for teachers who in recent months may be directly affected in body, mind and spirit, or may even have been traumatized, so as to help them regain their inner peace and resume their work or study.

### **Aspirations of the Faithful for a Journey of Reconciliation**

We are determined to pursue truth, justice and love, mainly to promote order and peace. However, under the current situation, no matter whether it be on the controversial social issue itself, or the root cause of the current chaos, or the way to manifest social justice, it is improbable to persuade various parties to dispel the differences among them in the short term and to calm all disputes. Hong Kong society still has to rely on persons or an organization with the highest credibility and statutory powers to use the resources and manpower they can mobilize to conduct summons, hearings, verifications and rulings in order to find out the truth, and to recommend to society at large long-lasting remedies and measures for reparation. This might take years to complete.

Just as South Africa had been subjected to racial segregation laws for nearly a century, countless local people were abused and hurt, and strong hatred pervaded different ethnic groups. However, the black leader Nelson Mandela established the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" in 1995 to encourage hostile people to come together, earnestly enter into dialogue with each other to restore the truth, to lead South Africa to realize national reconciliation, and to embark on the path of forgiveness and justice. During the process reasonable concerns and aspirations of all parties concerned were accommodated, which means that both sides needed to make painful concessions. The outcome of such negotiations should not and could not be a resolution on who be the winner or the loser. The whole of South Africa sought only to realize a common wish: "In the future of South Africa, regardless of race and color, everyone will live in harmony." Forgiveness is not a responsibility, but a free choice. Although it could not offset the evils that had already occurred, it gave people a chance to heal their traumatic experiences and get out of the deep vale of despair. Hence, justice and forgiveness is the dual process to bring about peace."<sup>13</sup> Such is the journey of peacemaking we Christians must go through.

### **Conclusion**

The sea holds every single drop of water so it can be boundless. It welcomes and accommodates all rivers. It is like the boundless love of Jesus Christ on the cross who forgives all sinners in the world. It embraces a world in which love and hatred coexist. Pope St. John Paul II in the encyclical "On Social Concern" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*) clearly points out that love is the first principle of the Church, the cornerstone of a steadfast faith. "The condemnation of evils and injustices is also part of that ministry of evangelization in the social field which is an aspect of the Church's prophetic role. But it should be made clear that proclamation is always more important than condemnation, and the latter cannot ignore the former, which gives it true solidity and the force of higher motivation." (para 41)

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<sup>13</sup> Translated from 「寬恕、正義與和平」魏明德著 陳德康譯《神思第五十七期 二零零三年五月 39-42 頁》

“But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for He makes His sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.” (Mt 5:44-45)

Love is the greatest virtue which transcends justice. “Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins.” (1P 4:8) We must avoid the seeds or the sources of all hatred with sincerity and selfless love. For the sake of love too, we should avoid uncritical trust in and spreading false information and rumors on social media to combat and eliminate any media of breeding hatred, and to maintain good relationships with other people and with God, so as to enjoy inner peace of mind.

World peace is a great vision. Yet peacemaking can start with small or insignificant acts. St. Teresa of Calcutta once said, "Peace begins with a smile. Every time you smile at someone, this is an act of love, a gift for people, a beautiful thing." We believe that this tiny gift can be prepared and delivered by each of us. Each of us can also be a humble tool for the peace of God, to live out the gospel spirit of the "Prayer for Peace" of St. Francis of Assisi:

Make me a channel of Your peace  
Where there is hatred, let me bring Your love  
Where there is injury, Your pardon Lord  
And where there's doubt, true faith in You  
Make me a channel of Your peace  
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope  
Where there is darkness, only light  
And where there's sadness, ever joy

Oh Master, grant that I may never seek  
So much to be consoled as to console  
To be understood as to understand  
To be loved as to love with all my soul

It is pardoning that we are pardoned  
In giving to all men that we receive  
And in dying that we're born to eternal life

Amidst darkness, the light is more dazzling. In the midst of chaos, peace is far more powerful. The earthly kingdom of God should never only exist in the scriptures. We need to build it by lifting our hearts together to God, with constant confidence and hope, through forbearing love and kindness to influence all those around us. As the People of God, how should we make our choices in the midst of chaos? Nothing else, but Faith, nothing else but Hope, and nothing else but Love!