

HOMILY
New Year's Day
January 1, 2007

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Dante, the great poet of the Renaissance, was exiled from his home in Florence, Italy. Depressed by his cruel turn of fate, he decided to walk from Italy to Paris. There, he could study philosophy and find a clue to the meaning of life. In his travels, Dante found himself, a weary pilgrim, forced to knock at the door of Santa Croce Monastery to find refuge from the night. A surly brother within was finally aroused. He came to the door, flung it open and, in a gruff voice, asked, "What do you want?" Dante answered in a single word, "**PEACE!**"

Dante is not alone. I think if there was one universal wish for young, old, and in between, it would be *peace*. Peace is a beautiful word; yet it is a word that is a stranger to many people today. Consider our fast-paced life, the presence of so much stress, the anxiety that fills our lives with so much worry.

As we celebrate this World Day of Prayer for Peace, where can we find peace? To find peace, we need to be right with God. That's the starting place because that is indeed what today is all about. Jesus Christ came into this world to set us right with God; Jesus came to bring us back to God.

Remember the old story about the elderly couple driving down the street one day? They were listening to the radio as the man drove the car through the busy Christmas streets. As they listened to the beautiful music of Christmas, the wife became nostalgic and said, "Herbert, do you remember when we were younger how we used to sit so close together as we drove along? It was so wonderful back then. What happened?" "I don't know about that," said Herbert. "All I know is that I haven't moved."

Our celebration is here to remind us that God is not the one who has moved away from us. We are the ones who moved. We are the ones who drifted away from him.

The first step toward peace in the New Year is be set right with God. Second, we need to be right with ourselves. More and more psychologists are telling us that we can't feel good about life and other people until we feel good about ourselves. They call it healthy self-esteem, which is simply another way of saying that we need to be right about ourselves.

Have you heard about the man who wrote a letter to the IRS? It read: "Dear Sirs: I underpaid my tax bill for last year. I can't sleep at night and my conscience is bothering me. Enclosed please find \$600." He then added the P.S. "If I still can't sleep, I'll send the rest." The only way we can be right with ourselves is to be made right by him.

Third, and finally, if we are going to find peace, we need to be right with other people. If you want to have a "peace-fill" New Year, go in the spirit of love and fix those broken relationships in your life. If you are alienated or estranged or cut off or at odds with any person, go in the spirit of the New Year and make peace. Don't put it off any longer. Drop your pride, drop your resentment, drop your grudges, and go set it right. Go...and God will go with you. God comes to us in Jesus Christ so that we might be set right with God, set right with ourselves, and set right with other people.

Happy New Year.