

HOMILY

The Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

New Year's Day

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Besides commemorating the start of a brand new year, as well as the Motherhood of Mary and the Circumcision of Jesus, today is also the World Day of Prayer for Peace. So as we bid farewell to 2008, as we begin the Year of Grace 2009, it would be appropriate to focus on peace.

I will never forget the first time I saw a photograph of Earth taken from a space camera and heard a commentary for one of the early astronauts. He said,

“The first thing you notice is that there are no lines dividing one nation from another as on our drawn maps. You know, it looks so beautiful; you just want to put your arms around it.”

The astronaut was reawakening the vision, the dream that God held up to us at the beginning of creation. It was the man and woman living in loving harmony with each other, with the natural environment, and with the Creator. When the forces of greed and lust and violence shattered that daydream, God sent us his Son. Jesus the Savior came to restore the harmony, to reunite us, to gather into one the dispersed children of God.

More than any other person, St. Francis of Assisi, caught that vision and gave it new life. He once summed up the mission of the community he founded:

“Brothers, we have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who lost the way.”

One of my favorite prayers is “*Lord make me an instrument of your peace.*”

Francis was only echoing the passionate desire of Jesus, his Lord. “*Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called children of God.*”

What if we took his dream seriously? What if we made it our central project for the New Year? Not all of us want to march or demonstrate for peace. Few of us have the skill or eloquence to go on radio or TV talk shows to speak about peace. Yet, I am convinced that all of us have the capacity to develop some simple, ordinary ways of being a peacemaker.

Basically, peace on earth begins within each one of us.

Peace is not just the absence of war. Peace is also a certain harmony, a sense of quiet and order in our lives. Peace is a feeling of being at one with each other and within ourselves. Most of us try to arrive at this peace by rearranging the world according to our desires. But, when that does not work, we finally agree with Dante in his great classic, *The Divine Comedy*:

“IN GOD’S WILL IS OUR PEACE.”

An old seminary professor who was sought out for his advice one time said to us, if you are ever going to have peace, you will have to start accepting the bad things in your life. Not that God sends them on purpose; but, once they are here, then they form part of God’s providence for us. So we should begin with the traditional prayer:

*Lord,
Grant us the Serenity to accept
the things we cannot Change,
the Courage to change the things we can,
and the Wisdom to know the difference.*

Many things in life cannot be changed. We cannot change our heredity or aging or sickness or the weather. It only destroys our good humor and peace of mind to keep on harping on the things that must be.

A good exercise for peace is to think about all the bad things in your life that you cannot change and decide to accept them—one at a time.

- I am getting older - I accept.
- My children are moving out or not moving out - I accept.
- My spouse has died - I accept.
- My job is at a dead end - I accept.

By doing this, we are not trying to trick ourselves into thinking that these are all wonderful things. They remain awful, but they lose their power to destroy our peace once we come to terms with them.

If, as Dante says, our peace is really in God's will, then the more we look at things from God's point of view, the more peaceful we will be.

So think of all the things you used to hate and all the things you used to love when you were a child. Recall all those important things you thought that you could not live without. How many of them still matter today? How many of them have lost their power or been transformed or simply passed away?

It is not a matter of denying these wonderful or not so wonderful facts. A full life calls for us to fully experience whatever happens to us. All we are trying to do is put all things into the proper perspective. God integrates all the ugly and the beautiful, the good and evil things of the universe into his life and manages to maintain himself in blissful peace. We also have to integrate the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly things into the fabric of our lives because, very simply, in God's will is our peace.

